

INTERNATIONAL STORIES

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THE SOFT-HEARTED SIOUX

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *American Indian Stories*, by Zitkala-Sa

I.

Beside the open fire I sat within our tepee. With my red blanket wrapped tightly about my crossed legs, I was thinking of the coming season, my sixteenth winter. On either side of the wigwam were my parents. My father was whistling a tune between his teeth while polishing with his bare hand a red stone pipe he had recently carved. Almost in front of me, beyond the center fire, my old grandmother sat near the entranceway.

She turned her face toward her right and addressed most of her words to my mother. Now and then she spoke to me, but never did she allow her eyes to rest upon her daughter's husband, my father. It was only upon rare occasions that my grandmother said anything to him. Thus his ears were open and ready to catch the smallest wish she might express.

Sometimes when my grandmother had been saying things which pleased him, my father used to comment upon them. At other times, when he could not approve of what was spoken, he used to work or smoke silently.

On this night my old grandmother began her talk about me. Filling the bowl of her red stone pipe with dry willow bark, she looked across at me.

"My grandchild, you are tall and are no longer a little boy." Narrowing her old eyes, she asked, "My grandchild, when are you going to bring here a handsome young woman?" I stared into the fire rather than meet her gaze. Waiting for my answer, she stooped forward and through the long stem drew a flame into the red stone pipe.

I smiled while my eyes were still fixed upon the bright fire, but I said nothing in reply. Turning to my mother, she offered her the pipe. I glanced at my grandmother. The loose buckskin sleeve fell off at her elbow and showed a wrist covered with silver bracelets. Holding up the fingers of her left hand, she named off the desirable young women of our village.

"Which one, my grandchild, which one?" she questioned.

"Hoh!" I said, pulling at my blanket in confusion. "Not yet!" Here my mother passed the pipe over the fire to my father. Then she, too, began speaking of what I should do.

"My son, be always active. Do not dislike a long hunt. Learn to provide much buffalo meat and many buckskins before you bring home a wife." Presently my father gave the pipe to my grandmother, and he took his turn in the exhortations.

"Ho, my son, I have been counting in my heart the bravest warriors of our people. There is not one of them who won his title in his sixteenth winter. My son, it is a great thing for some brave of sixteen winters to do."

Not a word had I to give in answer. I knew well the fame of my warrior father. He had earned the right of speaking such words, though even he himself was a brave only at my age. Refusing to smoke my grandmother's pipe because my heart was too much stirred by their words, and sorely troubled with a fear lest I should disappoint them, I arose to go. Drawing my blanket over my shoulders, I said, as I stepped toward the entranceway: "I go to hobble my pony. It is now late in the night."

Nine winters' snows had buried deep that night when my old grandmother, together with my father and mother, designed my future with the glow of a camp fire upon it.

Yet I did not grow up the warrior, huntsman, and husband I was to have been. At the mission school I learned it was wrong to kill. Nine winters I hunted for the soft heart of Christ, and prayed for the huntsmen who chased the buffalo on the plains.

In the autumn of the tenth year I was sent back to my tribe to preach Christianity to them. With the white man's Bible in my hand, and the white man's tender heart in my breast, I returned to my own people.

Wearing a foreigner's dress, I walked, a stranger, into my father's village.

Asking my way, for I had not forgotten my native tongue, an old man led me toward the tepee where my father lay. From my old companion I learned that my father had been sick many moons. As we drew near the tepee, I heard the chanting of a medicine-man within it. At once I wished to enter in and drive from my home the sorcerer of the plains, but the old warrior checked me. "Ho, wait outside until the medicine-man leaves your father," he said. While talking he scanned me from head to feet. Then he retraced his steps toward the heart of the camping-ground.

My father's dwelling was on the outer limits of the round-faced village. With every heartthrob I grew more impatient to enter the wigwam.

While I turned the leaves of my Bible with nervous fingers, the medicine-man came forth from the dwelling and walked hurriedly away. His head and face were closely covered with the loose robe which draped his entire figure.

He was tall and large. His long strides I have never forgot. They seemed to me then the uncanny gait of eternal death. Quickly pocketing my Bible, I went into the tepee.

Upon a mat lay my father, with furrowed face and gray hair. His eyes and cheeks were sunken far into his head. His sallow skin lay thin upon his pinched nose and high cheekbones. Stooping over him, I took his fevered hand. "How, Ate?" I greeted him. A light flashed from his listless eyes and his dried lips parted. "My son!" he murmured, in a feeble voice. Then again the wave of joy and recognition receded. He closed his eyes, and his hand dropped from my open palm to the ground.

Looking about, I saw an old woman sitting with bowed head. Shaking hands with her, I recognized my mother. I sat down between my father and

mother as I used to do, but I did not feel at home. The place where my old grandmother used to sit was now unoccupied. With my mother I bowed my head. Alike our throats were choked and tears were streaming from our eyes; but far apart in spirit our ideas and faiths separated us. My grief was for the soul unsaved; and I thought my mother wept to see a brave man's body broken by sickness.

Useless was my attempt to change the faith in the medicine-man to that abstract power named God. Then one day I became righteously mad with anger that the medicine-man should thus ensnare my father's soul. And when he came to chant his sacred songs I pointed toward the door and bade him go! The man's eyes glared upon me for an instant. Slowly gathering his robe about him, he turned his back upon the sick man and stepped out of our wigwam. "Ha, ha, ha! my son, I can not live without the medicine-man!" I heard my father cry when the sacred man was gone.

III.

On a bright day, when the winged seeds of the prairie-grass were flying hither and thither, I walked solemnly toward the centre of the camping-ground. My heart beat hard and irregularly at my side. Tighter I grasped the sacred book I carried under my arm. Now was the beginning of life's work.

Though I knew it would be hard, I did not once feel that failure was to be my reward. As I stepped unevenly on the rolling ground, I thought of the warriors soon to wash off their war-paints and follow me.

At length I reached the place where the people had assembled to hear me preach. In a large circle men and women sat upon the dry red grass. Within the ring I stood, with the white man's Bible in my hand. I tried to tell them of the soft heart of Christ.

In silence the vast circle of bareheaded warriors sat under an afternoon sun. At last, wiping the wet from my brow, I took my place in the ring. The hush of the assembly filled me with great hope.

I was turning my thoughts upward to the sky in gratitude, when a stir called me to earth again.

A tall, strong man arose. His loose robe hung in folds over his right shoulder. A pair of snapping black eyes fastened themselves like the poisonous fangs of a serpent upon me. He was the medicine-man. A tremor played about my heart and a chill cooled the fire in my veins.

Scornfully he pointed a long forefinger in my direction and asked:

"What loyal son is he who, returning to his father's people, wears a foreigner's dress?" He paused a moment, and then continued: "The dress of that foreigner of whom a story says he bound a native of our land, and heaping dry sticks around him, kindled a fire at his feet!" Waving his hand toward me, he exclaimed, "Here is the traitor to his people!"

I was helpless. Before the eyes of the crowd the cunning magician turned my honest heart into a vile nest of treachery. Alas! the people frowned as they looked upon me.

"Listen!" he went on. "Which one of you who have eyed the young man can see through his bosom and warn the people of the nest of young snakes hatching there? Whose ear was so acute that he caught the hissing of snakes whenever the young man opened his mouth? This one has not only proven false to you, but even to the Great Spirit who made him. He is a fool! Why do you sit here giving ear to a foolish man who could not defend his people because he fears to kill, who could not bring venison to renew the life of his sick father? With his prayers, let him drive away the enemy! With his soft heart, let him keep off starvation! We shall go elsewhere to dwell upon an untainted ground."

With this he disbanded the people. When the sun lowered in the west and the winds were quiet, the village of cone-shaped tepees was gone. The medicine-man had won the hearts of the people.

Only my father's dwelling was left to mark the fighting-ground.

IV.

From a long night at my father's bedside I came out to look upon the morning. The yellow sun hung equally between the snow-covered land and the cloudless blue sky. The light of the new day was cold. The strong breath of winter crusted the snow and fitted crystal shells over the rivers and lakes. As I stood in front of the tepee, thinking of the vast prairies which separated us from our tribe, and wondering if the high sky likewise separated the soft-hearted Son of God from us, the icy blast from the North blew through my hair and skull. My neglected hair had grown long and fell upon my neck.

My father had not risen from his bed since the day the medicine-man led the people away. Though I read from the Bible and prayed beside him upon my knees, my father would not listen. Yet I believed my prayers were not unheeded in heaven.

"Ha, ha, ha! my son," my father groaned upon the first snowfall. "My son, our food is gone. There is no one to bring me meat! My son, your soft heart has unfitted you for everything!" Then covering his face with the buffalo-robe, he said no more. Now while I stood out in that cold winter morning, I was starving. For two days I had not seen any food. But my own cold and hunger did not harass my soul as did the whining cry of the sick old man.

Stepping again into the tepee, I untied my snow-shoes, which were fastened to the tent-poles.

My poor mother, watching by the sick one, and faithfully heaping wood upon the centre fire, spoke to me:

"My son, do not fail again to bring your father meat, or he will starve to death."

"How, Ina," I answered, sorrowfully. From the tepee I started forth again to hunt food for my aged parents. All day I tracked the white level lands in vain. Nowhere, nowhere were there any other footprints but my own! In the evening of this third fast-day I came back without meat. Only a bundle of sticks for the fire I brought on my back. Dropping the wood outside, I lifted the door-flap and set one foot within the tepee.

There I grew dizzy and numb. My eyes swam in tears. Before me lay my old gray-haired father sobbing like a child. In his horny hands he clutched the buffalo-robe, and with his teeth he was gnawing off the edges. Chewing the dry stiff hair and buffalo-skin, my father's eyes sought my hands. Upon seeing them empty, he cried out:

"My son, your soft heart will let me starve before you bring me meat! Two hills eastward stand a herd of cattle. Yet you will see me die before you bring me food!"

Leaving my mother lying with covered head upon her mat, I rushed out into the night.

With a strange warmth in my heart and swiftness in my feet, I climbed over the first hill, and soon the second one. The moonlight upon the white country showed me a clear path to the white man's cattle. With my hand upon the knife in my belt, I leaned heavily against the fence while counting the herd.

Twenty in all I numbered. From among them I chose the best-fattened creature. Leaping over the fence, I plunged my knife into it.

My long knife was sharp, and my hands, no more fearful and slow, slashed

off choice chunks of warm flesh. Bending under the meat I had taken for my starving father, I hurried across the prairie.

Toward home I fairly ran with the life-giving food I carried upon my back. Hardly had I climbed the second hill when I heard sounds coming after me. Faster and faster I ran with my load for my father, but the sounds were gaining upon me. I heard the clicking of snowshoes and the squeaking of the leather straps at my heels; yet I did not turn to see what pursued me, for I was intent upon reaching my father. Suddenly like thunder an angry voice shouted curses and threats into my ear! A rough hand wrenched my shoulder and took the meat from me! I stopped struggling to run. A deafening whirl filled my head. The moon and stars began to move. Now the white prairie was sky, and the stars lay under my feet. Now again they were turning. At last the starry blue rose up into place. The noise in my ears was still. A great quiet filled the air. In my hand I found my long knife dripping with blood. At my feet a man's figure lay prone in blood-red snow. The horrible scene about me seemed a trick of my senses, for I could not understand it was real. Looking long upon the blood-stained snow, the load of meat for my starving father reached my recognition at last. Quickly I tossed it over my shoulder and started again homeward.

Tired and haunted I reached the door of the wigwam. Carrying the food before me, I entered with it into the tepee.

"Father, here is food!" I cried, as I dropped the meat near my mother. No answer came. Turning about, I beheld my gray-haired father dead! I saw by the unsteady firelight an old gray-haired skeleton lying rigid and stiff.

Out into the open I started, but the snow at my feet became bloody.

V.

On the day after my father's death, having led my mother to the camp of the medicineman, I gave myself up to those who were searching for the murderer of the paleface.

They bound me hand and foot. Here in this cell I was placed four days ago.

The shrieking winter winds have followed me hither. Rattling the bars, they howl unceasingly: "Your soft heart! your soft heart will see me die before you bring me food!" Hark! something is clanking the chain on the door. It is being opened. From the dark night without a black figure

crosses the threshold. * * * It is the guard. He comes to warn me of my fate. He tells me that tomorrow I must die. In his stern face I laugh aloud. I do not fear death.

Yet I wonder who shall come to welcome me in the realm of strange sight. Will the loving Jesus grant me pardon and give my soul a soothing sleep? or will my warrior father greet me and receive me as his son? Will my spirit fly upward to a happy heaven? or shall I sink into the bottomless pit, an outcast from a God of infinite love?

Soon, soon I shall know, for now I see the east is growing red. My heart is strong. My face is calm. My eyes are dry and eager for new scenes. My hands hang quietly at my side. Serene and brave, my soul awaits the men to perch me on the gallows for another flight. I go.

THE MURMURING FOREST

A Legend Of The Polyesie[D]

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I

The forest was murmuring.

There was always a murmuring in this forest, long-drawn, monotonous, like the undertones of a distant bell, like a faint song without words, like vague memories of the past. There was always a murmuring in the forest because it was a dense wood of ancient pines, untouched as yet by the axe and saw of the timber merchant. The tall, century-old trees with their mighty red-brown trunks stood in frowning ranks, proudly thrusting their green, interwoven tops aloft. The air under them was still and sweet with resin; bright ferns pierced the carpet of needles with which the ground was clothed, and superbly displayed their motionless, fringed foliage. Tall, green grass-blades had shot upward in the moist places, and there, too, white clover-heads drooped heavily, as if overcome with gentle languor. And always overhead, without a pause and without an end, droned the voice of the forest, the low sighing of the ancient pines.

But now these sighs had grown deeper and louder. I was riding along a woodland path, and although the sky was invisible, I knew, under the darkly frowning trees, that a storm was gathering overhead. The hour was late. A few last rays of sunlight were still filtering in here and

there between the tree-trunks, but misty shadows had already begun to gather in the thickets. A thunder-storm was brewing for the night. I was forced to abandon all idea of continuing the chase that day, and could only think of reaching a night's lodging before the storm broke. My horse struck his hoof against a bare root, snorted, and pricked his ears, harkening to the muffled impacts of the forest echo. Then of his own accord he turned his steps into the well-known path that led to the hut of the forest guard.

A dog barked. White plastered walls gleamed among the thinning tree-trunks, a blue wisp of smoke appeared, curling upward under the overshadowing branches, and a lop-sided cottage with a dilapidated roof stood before me, sheltering under a wall of ruddy tree-trunks. It seemed to have sunk down upon the ground, while the proud graceful pines nodded their heads, high, high above it. In the centre of the clearing stood two oak trees, huddling close to one another.

Here lived the foresters Zakhar and Maksim, the invariable companions of my hunting expeditions. But now they were evidently away from home, for no one came out of the house at the barking of the great collie. Only their old grandfather with his bald head and his grey whiskers was sitting on a bench outside the door, braiding shoes of bast. The old man's beard swept almost to his belt; his eyes were vague as if he were trying in vain to remember something.

"Good evening, daddy! Is any one at home?"

"Eh, hey," mumbled the old man, shaking his head; "neither Zakhar nor Maksim is here and Motria has gone into the wood for the cow. The cow has run away; perhaps the bears have eaten her. And so there is no one in the cottage."

"Well, well, never mind. I'll sit here with you and wait."

"Yes, sit down and wait!" the old man nodded, and watched me with dim, watery eyes as I tied my horse to the branch of one of the oaks. The old man was failing fast. He was nearly blind and his hands trembled.

"And who are you, lad?" he asked, as I sat down on the bench.

I was accustomed to hearing this question at every visit.

"Eh, hey; now I know, now I know," said the old man, resuming his work on the shoe. "My old head is like a sieve; nothing stays in it now. I remember people who died a long time ago, oh, I remember them well! But I forget new people. I have lived in this world a long time."

"Have you lived in this forest long, daddy?"

“Eh, hey; a long time! When the Frenchmen came into the Tsar’s country I was here.”

“You have seen much in your day. You must have many stories to tell.”

The old man looked at me with surprise.

“And what would I have seen, lad? I have seen the forest. The forest murmurs night and day, winter and summer. One hundred years have I lived in this forest like that tree there without heeding the passage of time. And now I must go to my grave, and sometimes I can’t tell, myself, whether I have lived in this world or not. Eh, hey; yes, yes. Perhaps, after all, I have not lived at all.”

A corner of the dark cloud moved out over the clearing from behind the close-growing tree-tops, and the pines that stood about the clearing rocked in the first gusts of wind. The murmur of the forest swelled into a great resonant chord. The old man raised his head and listened.

“A storm is coming,” he said after a pause. “I know. Oi, oi! A storm will howl to-night, and will break the pines and tear them up by the roots. The Master of the forest will come out.”

“How do you know that, daddy?”

“Eh, hey; I know it! I know what the trees are saying. Trees know what fear is as well as we do. There’s the aspen, a worthless tree that’s always getting broken to pieces. It trembles even when there is no wind. The pines in the forest sing and play, but if the wind rises ever so little they raise their voices and groan. This is nothing yet. There, listen to that! Although my eyes see badly, my ears can hear: that was an oak tree rustling. The oaks have been touched in the clearing. The storm is coming.”

And, as a matter of fact, the pair of low, gnarled oak trees that stood in the centre of the clearing, protected by the high wall of the forest, now waved their strong branches and gave forth a muffled rustling easily distinguishable from the clear, resonant notes of the pines.

“Eh, hey; do you hear that, lad?” asked the old man with a childishly cunning smile. “When the oak trees mutter like that, it means that the Master is coming out at night to break them. But no, he won’t break them! The oak is a strong tree, too strong even for the Master. Yes indeed!”

“What Master, daddy? You say yourself it is the storm that breaks them.”

The old man nodded his head with a crafty look.

“Eh, hey; I know that! They tell me there are some people in the world these days who don’t believe in anything. Yes indeed! But I have seen him as plainly as I see you now, and better, because my eyes are old now, and they were young then. Oi, oi! How well I could see when I was young!”

“When did you see him, daddy? Tell me, do!”

“It was an evening just like this. The pines began to groan in the forest. First they sang and then they groaned: oh-ah-o-oh-a-h! And then they stopped, and then they began again louder and more pitifully than ever. Eh, hey; they groaned because they knew that the Master would throw down many of them that night! And then the oak trees began to talk. And toward evening things grew worse until he came whirling along with the night. He ran through the forest laughing and crying, dancing and spinning, and always swooping down on those oak trees and trying to tear them up by the roots. And once in the Autumn I looked out of the window, and he didn’t like that. He came rushing up to the window and, bang-bang, he broke it with a pine knot. He nearly hit my face, bad luck to him! But I’m no fool. I jumped back. Eh, hey; lad, that’s the sort of a quarrelsome fellow he is!”

“But what does he look like?”

“He looks exactly like an old willow tree in a marsh. Just exactly! His hair is like dry mistletoe on a tree, and his beard too; but his nose is like a big fat pine knot and his mouth is as twisted as if it were all overgrown with lichen. Bah, how ugly he is! God pity any Christian that looks like him! Yes indeed! I saw him once quite close, in a swamp. If you’ll come here in the winter you can see him for yourself. You must go in that direction, up that hill--it is covered with woods--and climb to the very top of the highest tree. He can sometimes be seen from there racing along over the tree-tops, carrying a white staff in his hand, and whirling, whirling until he whirls down the hill into the valley. Then he runs away and disappears into the forest. Eh, hey! And wherever he steps he leaves a foot-print of white snow. If you don’t believe an old man come and see for yourself.”

The old man babbled on; the excited, anxious voices of the forest and the impending storm seemed to have set his old blood racing. The aged gaffer laughed and blinked his faded eyes.

But suddenly a shadow flitted across his high, wrinkled forehead. He nudged me with his elbow and said with a mysterious look:

“Let me tell you something, lad. Of course the Master of the forest is a worthless, good-for-nothing creature, that is true. It disgusts a Christian to see an ugly face like his, but let me tell you the truth

about him: he never does any one any harm. He plays jokes on people, of course, but as for hurting them, he never would do that!”

“But you said yourself, daddy, that he tried to hit you with a pine knot.”

“Eh, hey; he tried to! But he was angry then because I was looking at him through the window; yes indeed! But if you don’t go poking your nose into his affairs he’ll never play you a dirty trick. That’s what he’s like. Worse things have been done by men than by him in this forest. Eh, hey; they have indeed!”

The old man’s head dropped forward on to his breast and he sat silent for several minutes. Then he looked at me, and a ray of awakening memory seemed to gleam through the film that fogged his eyes.

“I’ll tell you an old story of our forest, lad. It happened here in this very place, a long, long time ago. Almost always I remember it as in a dream. But when the forest begins to talk more loudly, I remember it well. Shall I tell it to you?”

“Yes, do, daddy! Tell me!”

“Very well, I’ll tell you; eh, hey! Listen!”

II

My father and mother died, you know, a long time ago when I was only a little lad. They left me in the world alone. That’s what happened to me, eh, hey! Well, the village warden looked at me and thought: “What shall we do with this boy?” And the lord of the manor thought the same thing. And at that time Raman, the forest guard, came out of the forest, and he said to the warden: “Let me have that boy to take back to my cottage with me. I’ll take good care of him. It will be company for me in the forest and he will be fed.” That’s what he said, and the warden answered: “Take him!” So he took me. And I have lived in the forest ever since.

Raman brought me up here. God forbid that any one should look as terrible as he did! His eyes were black, his hair was black, and a dark soul looked out of his eyes because the man had lived alone in the forest all his life. The bears, people said, were his brothers and the wolves were his nephews. He knew all the wild animals and was afraid of none, but he kept away from people and wouldn’t even look at them. That’s what he was like. It’s the honest truth. When he looked at me I felt as if a cat were tickling my back with its tail. But he was a good man all the same, and I must say he fed me well. We always had buckwheat porridge with grease, and a duck if he happened to kill one.

Yes, he fed me well; it's the truth and I must say it.

So we two lived together. Raman used to go out into the forest every day and lock me up in the cottage so that the wild animals shouldn't eat me. Then they gave him a wife called Aksana.

The Count, who was the lord of the manor, gave him his wife. He called Raman to the village and said to him:

"Come, Raman, you must marry."

"How can I marry? What should I do with a wife in the forest when I already have a boy there? I don't want to marry!" he said.

He wasn't used to girls, that's what the matter was. But the Count was sly. When I remember him, lad, I think to myself: there are no men like him now, they are all gone. Take yourself, for instance. They say you are a Count's son too. That may be true, but you haven't got the--well the real thing, in you. You're a miserable little snip of a boy, that's all you are.

But he was a real one, just as they used to be. You may think it a funny thing that a hundred men should tremble before one, but look at the falcon, boy, and the chicken! Both are hatched out of an egg, but the falcon longs to soar as soon as his wings are strong. Then, when he screams in the sky, how not only the little chickens but the old cocks run! The noble is a falcon, the peasant is a hen.

I remember when I was a little boy seeing thirty peasants hauling heavy logs out of the forest and the Count riding along alone on his horse, twirling his whiskers. The horse under him was prancing, but he kept looking from side to side. Oi, oi! When the peasants met the Count, how they got out of his way, turning their horses aside into the snow, and how they took off their caps! They had heavy work afterwards pulling the logs out of the snow back on to the road while the Count galloped away. The road had been too narrow for him to pass the peasants of course! Whenever the Count moved an eyebrow the peasants trembled. When he laughed, they laughed; when he frowned, they cried. No one ever opposed the Count; it had never been done.

But Raman had grown up in the forest and did not know the ways of the world, so the Count was not very angry when he refused the girl.

"I want you to marry," the Count said. "Why I want you to do it is my business. Take Aksana."

"I don't want to," answered Raman. "I don't want her. Let the Devil marry her, I won't! There now!"

The Count ordered a knout to be brought. They stretched Raman out, and the Count asked him:

“Will you marry, Raman?”

“No,” he answered, “I won’t.”

“Then give it to him on the back,” commanded the Count, “as hard as you can lay it on.”

They gave it to him good and hard. Raman was a strong man, but he got tired of it at last.

“All right, stop!” he cried. “That’s enough. May all the devils in hell take her! I won’t suffer this torture for any woman! Give her to me; I’ll marry her!”

Now there lived at the Count’s castle a huntsman named Opanas. Opanas came riding in from the fields just as they were persuading Raman to be married. He heard Raman’s trouble and fell at the Count’s feet. He fell down and kissed them.

“What’s the use of thrashing that man, kind master?” he asked. “Better let me marry Aksana with a free will.”

Eh, hey; he wanted to marry her himself. That’s what he wanted, yes indeed!

So Raman was pleased and grew happy again. He got up and tied up his breeches and said:

“That’s splendid!” says he. “But why couldn’t you have come a little sooner, man? And the Count too--that’s how it always is! Wouldn’t it have been better to have found out first who wanted to marry her? Instead of that they grab the first man that comes along and begin flogging him! Do you think that is Christian?” he asked. “Bah!”

Eh, hey; he didn’t have any mercy on the Count, that’s the sort of man Raman was. When he got angry it was safest to keep out of his way, even for a Count. But the Count was sly! You see he was after something. He ordered Raman to be stretched out on the grass.

“I want to make you happy, fool!” he cried. “And you turn up your nose at me! You are living alone now like a bear in his den; it is dull for me when I come to see you. Lay it on to the fool until he says he has had enough! As for you Opanas, go to the devil! You weren’t asked to this party,” he said. “So don’t sit down at the table unless you want to be entertained like Raman.”

But Raman's anger had gone beyond joking by that time, eh, hey! They tickled him well, and, you know, people in those days could take a man's hide off beautifully with a knout, but he lay quite still and never said: that's enough! He endured it a long time, but at last he spat and cried:

"It's not right to baste a Christian like this for a woman without even counting the stripes! That's enough! And may your hands shrivel and drop off, you accursed servants! The devil himself must have taught you to use the knout. Do you think I'm a bundle of wheat on a threshing floor that you beat me like this? If that's your idea, I'm going to get married."

Then the Count laughed.

"That's splendid!" he cried. "Though you won't be able to sit down at your wedding, you will dance all the livelier."

The Count was a jolly man, indeed he was, eh, hey! Something bad happened to him afterwards though; God forbid that anything like that should ever happen to any Christian! I wouldn't wish it for any one. It wouldn't be right to wish it even for a Jew. That's what I think about it.

Well, they got Raman married. He brought his young wife to this cottage, and at first he did nothing but scold her and blame her for his thrashing.

"You're not worth a thrashing to any man!" he used to say.

As soon as he came home out of the forest he would chase her out of the house shouting:

"Away with you! I don't want a woman in my house! Don't let me see you here again! I don't like to have a woman sleeping here. I don't like the smell."

Eh, hey!

But later he got used to her. Aksana swept out the hut and painted it to look nice and clean, and put the china neatly away, and at last everything shone so brightly that one's heart grew merry at the sight of it. Raman saw what a good woman she was, and little by little he got used to her. Yes, he not only got used to her, lad, he began to love her. Yes indeed, I am telling you the truth. That's what happened to Raman. When he found out what the woman was like he said:

"Thanks to the Count I have learnt what a good thing is. What a fool I was! How many stripes I took, and now I see that it isn't so bad after

all! It is even good. That's the truth!"

And so some time passed, I don't know exactly how much. Then one day Aksana lay down on a bench and began to groan. That evening she was ill, and when I woke up in the morning I heard a shrill little voice squeaking. Eh, hey, I thought to myself, I know what has happened, a baby has been born! And so it had.

The baby did not stay long in this world. Only from that morning until night. It stopped squeaking in the evening. Aksana cried, but Raman said:

"The child has gone, so now we won't call in the priest. We can bury it ourselves under a pine tree."

That's what Raman said. And he not only said it, he did it. He dug a little grave under a tree and buried the child. There stands the old stump of the tree to this day. It has been split by lightning. Yes, that is the same pine tree under which Raman buried the child. And I'll tell you something, boy: to this day when the sun goes down and the stars shine out over the forest a little bird comes flying to that tree and cries. It pipes so sadly, poor little bird, that one's heart aches to hear it. It is the little unchristened soul crying for a cross. A learned man, they say, who knows things out of books, could give it a cross and then it would not fly about any more. But we live here in the forest and don't know anything. It comes flying up begging for help and all we can say is: "You poor, poor little soul, we can't do anything for you!" So then it cries and flies away, and next day it comes back again. Ah, boy, I'm sorry for the poor little soul!

Well, when Aksana got well again she was always going to the grave. She would sit on the grave and cry; sometimes she would cry so loudly that her voice could be heard through the whole forest. She was grieving for her baby, but Raman did not grieve for the baby, he grieved for her. He used to come back out of the forest and stand by Aksana and say:

"Be quiet, silly woman! What is there to cry for? One child has died but there may be another. And a better one, perhaps! Because that one may not have been mine, I don't know whether it was or not, but the next one will be mine!"

Aksana did not like it when he talked like that. She would stop crying and begin to howl at him with bad words. Then Raman would get angry.

"What are you howling for?" he would ask. "I didn't say anything of the kind. I only said I didn't know. And the reason I don't know is because you were living in the world among men then, and not in the forest. So how can I be sure? Now you are living in the forest; now it is all right. Old granny Feodosia said when I went to the village to fetch

her: 'Your baby came very quickly, Raman.' And I said to the old woman: 'How do I know whether it came quickly or not?' But come now, stop bawling or I'll get angry, and might even beat you."

Well, Aksana would shout at him for a while and then she would stop. She would scold him and hit him on the back, but when Raman began to get angry himself she would grow quiet. She would be frightened. She used to embrace him then, and kiss him, and look into his eyes. Then my Raman would grow quiet again. Because, you know, lad--but you probably don't know, though I do, even if I have never married, because I'm an old man--I know that a young woman is so sweet to kiss that she can twist any man around her finger at will no matter how angry he is. Oi, oi, I know what these women are! And Aksana was a tidy young thing; one doesn't see her like now-a-days. I'll tell you, lad, women are not what they were.

Well, one day a horn blew in the forest: tara-tara-ta-ta! That's how it echoed through the forest, clearly and gaily. I was a little fellow then and didn't know what it was. I saw the birds rising from their nests and flapping their wings and screaming, and I saw the hares skipping over the ground with their ears laid back, as fast as they could scamper. I thought perhaps it was some unknown wild animal making that pretty noise. But it was not a wild animal, it was the Count trotting through the forest on his horse and blowing his horn. Behind him came his huntsmen leading their hounds on the leash. The handsomest of all the huntsmen was Opanas, caracoling behind the Count dressed in a long blue Cossack coat. Opanas' cap had a peaked golden crown, his horse was capering under him, his carbine was glistening on his back, and his bandura[E] was slung across his shoulder by a strap. The Count liked Opanas because he played well on the bandura and was an expert at singing songs. Ah, this lad Opanas was handsome, terribly handsome! The Count simply didn't compare with Opanas. The Count was bald and his nose was red and his eyes, though they were merry, were not like those of Opanas! When Opanas looked at me--at me, a little whipper-snapper--I couldn't help laughing, and I wasn't a young girl! People said that Opanas' father was a Cossack from beyond the Dnieper; every one there is handsome and nimble and sleek. And think, boy, the difference there is between flying across the plains like a bird with a horse and a lance, and chopping wood with an axe!

Well, I ran out of the hut and looked, and there came the Count and stopped right in front of the house, and the huntsmen stopped too. Raman ran out of the hut and held the Count's stirrup and the Count climbed down from his horse. Raman bowed to him.

"Good day!" the Count says to Raman.

"Eh, hey," answers Raman. "I'm very well, thanks, and how are you?"

You see, Raman didn't know how to answer the Count as he ought to have done. The attendants all laughed at his words and the Count laughed too.

"I'm very glad you are well," says the Count. "And where is your wife?"

"Where should my wife be? My wife is in the hut."

"Then we'll go into the hut," says the Count. "And meanwhile light a fire, lads, and prepare something to eat, for we have come to congratulate the young couple."

So they went into the hut; the Count, and Opanas, and Raman bareheaded behind them with Bogdan, the oldest of the huntsmen and the Count's faithful servant. There are no servants like him in the world now.

Bogdan was old and ruled the other attendants sternly, but in the Count's presence he was like that dog there. There was no one in the world for Bogdan except the Count. People said that when Bogdan's father and mother had died he had asked the old Count for a house and land, for he wanted to marry. But the old Count would not allow it. He made him the young Count's servant and said: "There are your mother and father and wife!" So Bogdan took the boy and taught him to ride and shoot. And the young Count grew up and began to rule in his father's place, and old Bogdan still followed him like a dog.

Okh, I'll tell you the truth. Many people have cursed Bogdan; many tears have fallen because of him, and all on account of the Count. At one word from the Count, Bogdan would have torn his own father to shreds.

Well, I was a little fellow, and I ran into the house behind the Count. I was curious to see what would happen. Wherever he went I went too.

Well, I looked, and there, standing in the middle of the hut, I saw the Count stroking his whiskers and laughing. And there was Raman standing first on one foot and then on another, crushing his hat in his hands, and there, too, was Opanas leaning against the wall, looking, poor fellow, like a young oak in a storm. He was frowning and sad.

All three were turned toward Aksana. Only old Bogdan was sitting on a bench in a corner with his top-knot[F] hanging down, waiting for the Count to give him an order. Aksana was standing in a corner by the stove with her eyes on the floor, as crimson as that poppy there in the barley. Okh, it was plain the witch felt that something wicked was about to happen because of her. Let me tell you something, lad: if three men stand looking at one woman nothing good ever comes of it. Hair is sure to fly, if nothing worse. I know that, because I have seen it happen myself.

“How now, Raman, lad?” laughed the Count. “Did I give you a good wife or not?”

“Not bad,” answered Raman. “The woman will do.”

Here Opanas shrugged his shoulders, raised his eyes to Aksana, and muttered:

“What a woman she is! If only that goose hadn’t got her!”

Raman overheard the words and turned to Opanas and said:

“Why do I seem a goose to you, Lord Opanas? Eh, hey; tell me that!”

“Because you don’t know how to protect your wife; that’s why you’re a goose.”

That’s what Opanas said to him! The Count stamped his foot. Bogdan shook his head, but Raman thought a minute and then raised his head and looked at the Count.

“Why should I protect her?” he asked Opanas, but his eyes were fixed on the Count. “There’s no one here in the forest except wild beasts, unless it is our gracious Count when he comes. Whom should I protect her from? Look out, you misbegotten Cossack you, don’t provoke me, or before you know it I’ll have you by the forelock!”

And perhaps the business would have ended in a thrashing if the Count hadn’t interfered. He stamped his foot, and every one was silent.

“Gently there, you Devil’s spawn,” he said. “You didn’t come here to fight. Congratulate the young people first, and then in the evening we’ll go hunting on the marsh. Here, follow me!”

The Count turned on his heel and left the hut. The attendants had already spread a dinner under the trees. Bogdan followed the Count, but Opanas stayed with Raman in the front entry.

“Don’t be angry with me, brother,” said the Cossack. “Listen to what Opanas has to tell you. You saw how I rolled in the dust at the Count’s feet, and kissed his boots, and begged him to give me Aksana? Well, God bless you, man! The priest has tied you up; it’s your luck, I see, but my heart can’t stand that wicked fellow making sport of you and of her again. Hey ho, no one knows what I have in my heart! It would be well were I to lay him in the cold ground for a bed with the help of my gun!”

Raman stared at the Cossack and asked:

“Have you gone out of your head this hour, Cossack?”

I did not hear what Opanas began whispering to Raman in the front entry in answer to this; I only heard Raman clap him on the back.

“Okh, Opanas, Opanas! How wicked and cunning people are in this world! I knew nothing of this, living in the forest. Eh, hey, Count, Count, what evil you have brought on your head!”

“Come!” Opanas says to him. “Go now, and don’t show anything, especially before Bogdan. You’re a simple man and that hound of the Count’s is crafty. Be sure you don’t drink much of the Count’s wine; and if he sends you out on the marsh with the huntsmen and himself wants to stay behind, lead the huntsmen to the old oak tree, put them on a round-about road, and tell them that you are going to walk straight through the forest. Then come back here as quick as you can.”

“Good,” says Raman. “It’s hunting I shall go, though my gun won’t be loaded with bird-shot for little birds, but with a good stout bullet for a bear.”

Then they went out. The Count was sitting on a carpet on the ground. He ordered a flagon of wine and a goblet to be brought to him, filled a goblet full and passed it to Raman. Eh, hey; the Count’s flagon and goblet were fair to see and his wine was better still. One little goblet, and your heart would be full of happiness; another, and it would leap in your breast; if a man were not used to it he would roll under his seat after the third unless a woman were there to lay him on top of it.

Eh, hey; I tell you, the Count was clever. He wanted to make Raman drunk on his wine, but there was no wine in the world that could overpower Raman. He emptied one goblet from the Count’s hands and then another, and still another, until his eyes glowed like a wolf’s and his black whiskers began to twitch. The Count at last grew angry.

“How sturdily that Devil’s spawn can lap up the wine and never blink an eye! Any other fellow would have been blubbering by now, but look at him, lads; he is laughing still!”

The wicked Count well knew that if a man cried from wine his top-knot would soon be trailing on the table. But this time he had mistaken his man.

“And why should I cry?” asked Raman in return. “That would even be rude. The gracious Count comes to congratulate me on my marriage and I begin to howl like a woman! Thank God I have nothing to cry for yet; let my enemies do the crying!”

“That means you are contented?” asks the Count.

“Eh, hey! And why should I be discontented?”

“Do you remember how I betrothed you with the help of a knout?”

“How should I not remember? I was a foolish man then and didn’t know bitter from sweet. The knout was bitter, but I loved it better than a woman. Thanks to you, gracious Count, this fool has learned to eat honey.”

“All right, all right,” says the Count. “And now I want you to do me a good turn. Go out on the marsh with my huntsmen and shoot as many birds as you can, and especially do I want you to get me a blackcock.”

“And when does the Count send us out on the marsh?” asks Raman.

“When you have had one more drink. Opanas will sing us a song, and then go in God’s name.”

Raman fixes his eyes on the Count and says:

“That will not be easy. It is late, the marsh is far, and, besides, the forest is murmuring in the wind; there will be a storm to-night. How can one kill a shy bird on an evening like this?”

But the Count was drunk, and he was always powerfully bad-tempered in his cups. He heard his attendants whispering among themselves that “surely Raman was right, there would soon be a storm,” and he was very angry. He slammed down his goblet and glared about him. Every man held his tongue.

Only Opanas was not afraid; he stepped out as the Count had told him to do to sing his song with his bandura. He tuned it, glanced sideways at the Count, and said:

“Come to your senses, gracious Lord! When has it ever been known that men went hunting birds at night, in a dark forest, in the midst of a storm?”

That’s how bold he was! The other serfs of the Count were afraid, of course, but he was a free man of Cossack birth. An old Cossack player of the bandura had brought him as a youngster from the Ukraine. There, lad, the people had made trouble in the town of Uman. They had put out this old Cossack’s eyes, cut off his ears, and sent him out like that into the world. So he had walked and walked, from village to town, and wandered into our country with the little lad Opanas as his guide. The old Count took him into his house because he loved beautiful songs. So when the old man died, Opanas grew up in the palace. The young Count grew to like him, and would often endure speeches from him for which he

would have flayed three skins off the back of another man.

So it was now. He was angry at first, and the men thought he was going to hit the Cossack, but he soon spoke to Opanas and said:

“Oi, Opanas, Opanas! You’re a clever lad, but it’s plain you don’t understand that no man should put his nose in the crack of a door for fear some one might slam it.”

That’s how he guessed the Cossack’s riddle! And the Cossack saw at once he had guessed it. And he answered the Count in a song. Oi, if the Count had been able to understand a Cossack song, his Countess might not have had to shed tears over him that night! “Thank you, Count, for your wisdom,” said Opanas. “Now in return I am going to sing to you. Listen well.”

Then he raised his head and looked up at the sky; he saw an eagle soaring there and the wind driving the dark clouds along. He listened and heard the tall pines murmuring.

And once more he struck the strings of his bandura.

Eh, lad, you never chanced to hear Opanas play, and now you will never hear it! The bandura is a simple trick, but oh, how well a man who knows it can make it talk! When Opanas ran his hand across the strings it told him everything: how the dark pine forest sings in a storm; how the wind hums through the sedge on the desert steppe; how the dry grass whispers on a high Cossack grave.

No, lad, you won’t hear such playing as that now-a-days!

All kinds of people come here now that have been not only in our Polyesie but in other countries as well: all over the Ukraine, in Chirigin and Poltava and Kiev. They say that players of the bandura are out of fashion now and that you never hear them at fairs and in the bazaars. I still have an old bandura hanging on the wall of the hut. Opanas taught me to play it, but no one has learnt to play it from me. When I die--and that will be soon--who knows, perhaps nobody in the wide world will ever hear the notes of a bandura again. No, indeed!

And Opanas began singing a song in a low voice. Opanas’ voice was not loud; it was brooding and sad, and went straight to the heart. And the song, lad, was made up for the Count by the Cossack himself. I have never heard it again, and when, later, I used to tease Opanas to sing it, he always refused.

“The man for whom that song was sung,” he would say, “is no longer in this world.”

The Cossack told the Count all the truth in that song, and what the Count's fate would be, and the Count wept; the tears even trickled down his beard, and yet it was plain that not one word did he understand.

Okh, I can't remember the song; I can only remember a few words. The Cossack sang about Count Ivan:

“Oi, Ivan! Alas, oi, Count!
The Count is clever and much he knows.
He knows that the falcon soars in the sky, and falls upon the crow.
Oi, Ivan! Alas, oi, Count!
But the Count does not know
How it is in this world,
That the crow will at last kill the falcon at its nest.”

There, lad! I seem to hear that song at this moment, and to see those men again. There stands the Cossack with his bandura; the Count is sitting on his carpet; his head is bowed, and he is weeping. The Count's men are gathered about him and are nudging one another with their elbows, and old Bogdan is shaking his head. And the forest is murmuring, just as it is murmuring now, and the bandura is chiming softly, dreamily, while the Cossack sings of how the Countess wept over the grave of Count Ivan:

“She cries, the Countess cries,
While over the grave of Count Ivan a black crow flies.”

Okh, the Count did not understand that song. He wiped his eyes and said:

“Come now, Raman! Come, lads, mount your horses! And you, Opanas, ride with them; I've had enough of your singing! That was a good song, only you sang of things that never happen in this world.”

But the Cossack's heart was softened by his song and his eyes were dim.

“Okh, Count, Count,” says Opanas. “In my country the old men say that legends and songs contain the truth. But in legends the truth is like iron that has passed through the world from hand to hand for many years and has grown rusty. But the truth in songs is like gold that rust will never corrode. That's what the old men say!”

But the Count waved his hand.

“It may be so in your country, but here it is not so. Go, go, Opanas; I am tired of listening to you.”

The Cossack stood still for a moment and then fell at the Count's feet.

“Do as I beseech you, Count!” he cried. “Mount your horse and ride home

to your Countess! My heart foretells disaster.”

At that the Count grew angry in earnest. He kicked the Cossack aside with his boot as if he had been a dog.

“Get out of my sight!” he shouted. “Now I see that you’re not a Cossack but an old woman! Leave me, or evil will befall you! What are you waiting for, hounds? Am I no longer your master? Here, I’ll show you something that your fathers never saw done by my father!”

Opanas rose like a dark thunder-cloud and exchanged glances with Raman. Raman was standing off at one side, leaning on his carbine as if nothing had happened.

The Cossack struck his bandura against a tree; the bandura flew to pieces and the sound of its groan echoed through the forest.

“Very well, then!” he cried. “Let the devils in the next world teach him who will not hear wise counsel in this! I see, Count, you have no need of a faithful servant!”

Before the Count could answer Opanas had jumped into his saddle and ridden away. The other attendants mounted their horses too. Raman shouldered his carbine and walked away; as he passed the hut he called out to Aksana:

“Put the boy to sleep, Aksana; it is time. And prepare a bed for the Count!”

They had soon all ridden away into the wood by that road there, and the Count went into the hut; only the Count’s horse was left standing outside, tied to a tree. Night was already falling; a murmur was going about the forest, and a few drops of rain were falling, just as they are now. Aksana laid me to sleep in the hayloft and made the sign of the cross over me for the night. I could hear my Aksana crying.

Okh, what could a little lad like me understand of all that was going on? I wrapped myself in the hay and lay listening to the storm singing its song in the forest until I began to fall asleep.

Eh, hey! Suddenly I heard footsteps outside the hut. They reached the tree, and some one untied the Count’s horse. The horse snorted and stamped and galloped away into the forest. The sound of its hoofs soon died away in the distance. But before long I heard galloping again; some one was coming down the road. This man rode up post haste, jumped down from his saddle, and rushed to the window of the hut.

“Count! Count!” cried the voice of old Bogdan. “Oi, Count! Open the door quickly! That devil of a Cossack means harm! He has let your horse

loose in the forest!”

Before the old man had time to finish his sentence he was seized from behind. I was frightened, for I heard something fall.

The Count tore open the door and jumped out with his carbine in his hand, but Raman caught him in the front entry right by the top-knot as he had done the other, and flung him to the ground as well.

The Count saw that things were going badly for him and he cried:

“Oi, let me go, Raman, lad! Have you forgotten the good turn I did you?”

Raman answered:

“I remember, wicked Count, the good turn you did me and my wife. And now I shall pay you for it.”

But the Count cried again:

“Help me, help me, Opanas, my faithful servant! I have loved you as my own son!”

But Opanas answered:

“You drove your faithful servant away like a dog. You have loved me as a stick loves the back which it beats, and now you love me as the back loves the stick which beats it! I begged and implored you to listen to me. You wouldn’t!”

Then the Count began calling to Aksana for help.

“Intercede for me, Aksana; you have a kind heart!”

Aksana came running out, wringing her hands.

“I begged you on my knees, Count, at your feet I once begged you, to spare my maidenhood, and to-night I besought you not to defile me, a married woman. You would not spare me, and now you are asking mercy for yourself. Okh, do not ask it from me; what can I do?”

“Let me go!” cried the Count once more. “You will all go to Siberia because of me!”

“Do not grieve for us, Count,” answered Opanas. “Raman will be out on the marsh before your men get back, and, as for me, I am alone in the world, thanks to your kindness. I shan’t worry about myself. I shall shoulder my carbine and be off into the forest. I shall gather together a band of lusty lads and we shall roam through the country, coming

forth out of the forest onto the highroads at night. When we reach a village we shall make straight for the Count's domain. Come on, Raman, lad, raise up the Count and let us carry his honour out into the rain."

Then the Count began to struggle and scream, but Raman only growled under his breath, and Opanas laughed. So they went out.

But I took fright. I rushed into the hut and ran straight to Aksana. My Aksana was sitting on a bench, as white as that plaster wall.

And the storm was raging in earnest through the forest by now; the pines were shouting with many voices, and the wind was howling, while from time to time a clap of thunder would rend the air. Aksana and I sat on a bench, and all at once I heard someone groan in the forest. Oh, he groaned so pitifully that to-day when I remember it my heart grows heavy, and yet it happened many years ago.

"Aksana," I asked, "dear Aksana, who is that groaning in the forest?"

But she took me in her arms and rocked me and said:

"Go to sleep, little lad, it is nothing! It is only--the forest murmuring."

And the forest was murmuring indeed! Oh, how loudly it was talking that night!

We sat there together a little while longer and then I heard what I thought was a shot in the forest.

"Aksana," I asked, "dear Aksana, who is that shooting with a gun?"

But she only rocked me and answered:

"Be quiet, be quiet, little lad; that is God's lightning striking in the forest."

But she herself was crying, and holding me close to her breast. She rocked me to sleep, repeating softly:

"The forest is murmuring; the forest is murmuring, little lad."

So I lay in her arms and went to sleep.

And when morning came, lad, I jumped up, and there was the sun shining and Aksana sitting all dressed in the hut. I remembered what had happened the night before and thought: "It was all a dream!"

But it was not a dream; oi, no, not a dream; it was true. I ran out of

the hut into the forest. The birds were singing and the dew was shining on the grass. I ran into the thicket and there I saw the Count and a huntsman lying side by side. The Count was peaceful and pale, but the huntsman was grey, like a dove, and stern as if he had been alive. On the breasts of the Count and of the huntsman were bloody stains.

* * * * *

“Well, and what became of the others?” I asked, seeing that the old man had bowed his head and was silent.

“Eh, hey! That is all there is to the story, as Opanas the Cossack used to say. He lived long in the forest, roaming about the highroads and over the domains of the nobles with his lads. His fate had been written at his birth; his fathers had been robbers and a robber he had to be. He came here to this hut more than once, lad, most often when Raman was away. He would come and sit for a while and sing a song and play upon his bandura. But when he came with his comrades, Aksana and Raman would always be here together to greet him. Okh, to tell you the truth, lad, guilty deeds have been done here. Maksim and Zakhar will soon come back out of the forest--look well at them both. I say nothing to them about it, but any one who knew Raman and Opanas could tell at a glance which one of the boys looks like which, although they are not the sons but the grandsons of those men. That is what has been done here in this forest, lad, in my memory.

“And the forest is murmuring loudly to-night. There will be rain.”

III

The old man spoke the last words as if he were tired. His excitement had died out, his tongue was tripping, his head was shaking, and his eyes were full of tears.

Night had fallen; the forest was wrapped in darkness. The wind was thundering against the but like a rising tide. The black tree-tops were tossing like the crests of waves in a fierce gale.

Soon a merry barking announced the approach of the dogs and their masters. Both foresters appeared striding swiftly toward the hut, and behind them came the panting Motria, driving in her lost cow. Our company was now complete.

A few minutes later we were sitting in the hut. A cheerful fire was crackling in the stove; Motria was preparing our supper.

Although I had seen Zakhar and Maksim many times before, I now looked at them with especial interest. Zakhar's face was dark. His eyebrows

grew out from under a straight, low forehead, and his eyes were sombre, although a natural kindness and an inherent strength could also be read in his features. Maksim's glance was frank and his grey eyes were caressing; he ruffled his fair curls now and then, and his laugh was peculiarly ringing and merry.

"And what has the old man been telling you?" asked Maksim. "That old legend about our grandfather?"

"Yes," I answered.

"There now, he always does that! When the forest begins to murmur loudly he always remembers the past. Now he won't be able to sleep all night."

"He is like a little child," added Motria, pouring out the old man's tea.

The old man seemed not to know that they were talking of him. He had entirely collapsed, and was smiling vacantly from time to time and nodding his head. Only when the storm that was blustering through the forest shook the hut did he seem to grow anxious; then he would lend an ear to the noise, harkening to it with a frightened look on his face.

Soon all grew quiet in the hut. A tallow-dip flickered dimly and a cricket was chirping its monotonous song. In the forest a thousand mighty but muffled voices were talking together and calling fiercely to one another through the night. Terrible powers seemed to be holding a noisy conclave in the outer darkness. From time to time the tumultuous thunder would rise and swell and the door of the hut would quiver as if some one were leaning against it from the outside, hissing with rage, while the nocturnal tempest piped a piteous, heart-breaking note in the chimney. At moments the fury of the storm would abate and an ominous silence would fall and oppress the heart, until once more the thunder would rise, as if the ancient pines had plotted to suddenly tear themselves from their roots and fly away into an unknown land in the arms of the blast.

I lost myself for a few moments in a confused slumber, but it could not have been for long. The gale was howling through the forest in many tones and keys. The tallow-dip flared and lit up the hut. The old man was sitting on his bench feeling about him with his arms as if he expected to find somebody near him. A look of fear and almost of childish helplessness distorted the face of the poor old man.

"Aksana!" I heard his piteous whisper. "Dear Aksana, who is that groaning in the forest?"

His hands fluttered anxiously and he seemed to be listening for a reply.

“Eh, hey,” he spoke again. “No one is groaning; it is the noise of the storm in the forest. That is all; it is the forest murmuring, murmuring----”

A few minutes passed. Bluish flashes of lightning stared every second or two into the little window, and the tall, fantastic forms of the pines kept springing out of the darkness and vanishing again into the angry heart of the storm. Suddenly a brilliant light dimmed the pale flame of the tallow-dip and a sharp, near-by peal of thunder crashed over the forest.

The old man again moved anxiously on his bench.

“Aksana, dear Aksana, who is that shooting with a gun?”

“Go to sleep, grandfather, go to sleep,” I heard Motria’s quiet voice answer from her place on the stove. “It’s always like this. He always calls Aksana if there’s a storm at night. He forgets that Aksana has long been dead. Okh--ho!”

Motria yawned, whispered a prayer, and silence fell once more in the hut, broken only by the noise of the forest and the old man’s anxious whispering:

“The forest is murmuring, the forest is murmuring--dear Aksana----”

Soon a heavy rain began to fall, drowning with its descending torrents the groans of the pines.

THE KING’S SWEETHEART

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Droll Stories, Complete*, by Honore de Balzac
Translator: Anonymous, London, UK, 1874

There lived at this time at the forges of the Pont-aux-Change, a goldsmith whose daughter was talked about in Paris on account of her great beauty, and renowned above all things for her exceeding gracefulness. There were those who sought her favours by the usual tricks of love and, but others offered large sums of money to the father to give them his daughter in lawful wedlock, the which pleased him not a little.

One of his neighbours, a parliamentary advocate, who by selling his cunning devices to the public had acquired as many lands as a dog has

fleas, took it into his head to offer the said father a domain in consideration of his consent to this marriage, which he ardently desired to undertake. To this arrangement our goldsmith was nothing loth. He bargained away his daughter, without taking into consideration the fact that her patched-up old suitor had the features of an ape and had scarcely a tooth in his jaws. The smell which emanated from his mouth did not however disturb his own nostrils, although he was filthy and high flavoured, as are all those who pass their lives amid the smoke of chimneys, yellow parchment, and other black proceedings. Immediately this sweet girl saw him she exclaimed, "Great Heaven! I would rather not have him."

"That concerns me not," said the father, who had taken a violent fancy to the proffered domain. "I give him to you for a husband. You must get on as well as you can together. That is his business now, and his duty is to make himself agreeable to you."

"Is it so?" said she. "Well then, before I obey your orders I'll let him know what he may expect."

And the same evening, after supper, when the love-sick man of law was pleading his cause, telling her he was mad for her, and promising her a life of ease and luxury, she taking him up, quickly remarked--

"My father had sold me to you, but if you take me, you will make a bad bargain, seeing that I would rather offer myself to the passers-by than to you. I promise you a disloyalty that will only finish with death--yours or mine."

Then she began to weep, like all young maidens will before they become experienced, for afterwards they never cry with their eyes. The good advocate took this strange behaviour for one of those artifices by which the women seek to fan the flames of love and turn the devotion of their admirers into the more tender caress and more daring osculation that speaks a husband's right. So that the knave took little notice of it, but laughing at the complaints of the charming creature, asked her to fix the day.

"To-morrow," replied she, "for the sooner this odious marriage takes place, the sooner I shall be free to have gallants and to lead the gay life of those who love where it pleases them."

Thereupon the foolish fellow--as firmly fixed as a fly in a glue pot --went away, made his preparations, spoke at the Palace, ran to the High Court, bought dispensations, and conducted his purchase more quickly than he ever done one before, thinking only of the lovely girl. Meanwhile the king, who had just returned from a journey, heard nothing spoken of at court but the marvellous beauty of the jeweller's daughter who had refused a thousand crowns from this one, snubbed that

one; in fact, would yield to no one, but turned up her nose at the finest young men of the city, gentlemen who would have forfeited their seat in paradise only to possess one day, this little dragon of virtue.

The good king, was a judge of such game, strolled into the town, past the forges, and entered the goldsmith's shop, for the purpose of buying jewels for the lady of his heart, but at the same time to bargain for the most precious jewel in the shop. The king not taking a fancy to the jewels, or they not being to his taste, the good man looked in a secret drawer for a big white diamond.

"Sweetheart," said he, to the daughter, while her father's nose was buried in the drawer, "sweetheart, you were not made to sell precious stones, but to receive them, and if you were to give me all the little rings in the place to choose from, I know one that many here are mad for; that pleases me; to which I should ever be subject and servant; and whose price the whole kingdom of France could never pay."

"Ah! sire!" replied the maid, "I shall be married to-morrow, but if you will lend me the dagger that is in your belt, I will defend my honour, and you shall take it, that the gospel made be observed wherein it says, 'Render unto Caesar the things which be Caesar's' . . ."

Immediately the king gave her the little dagger, and her brave reply rendered him so amorous that he lost his appetite. He had an apartment prepared, intending to lodge his new lady-love in the Rue a l'Hirundelle, in one of his palaces.

And now behold my advocate, in a great hurry to get married, to the disgust of his rivals, the leading his bride to the altar to the clang of bells and the sound of music, so timed as to provoke the qualms of diarrhoea. In the evening, after the ball, comes he into the nuptial chamber, where should be reposing his lovely bride. No longer is she a lovely bride--but a fury--a wild she-devil, who, seated in an armchair, refuses her share of her lord's couch, and sits defiantly before the fire warming at the same time her ire and her calves. The good husband, quite astonished, kneels down gently before her, inviting her to the first passage of arms in that charming battle which heralds a first night of love; but she utters not a word, and when he tries to raise her garment, only just to glance at the charms that have cost him so dear, she gives him a slap that makes his bones rattle, and refuses to utter a syllable.

This amusement, however, by no means displeased our friend the advocate, who saw at the end of his troubles that which you can as well imagine as he did; so played he his share of the game manfully, taking cheerfully the punishment bestowed upon him. By so much

hustling about, scuffling, and struggling he managed at last to tear away a sleeve, to slit a petticoat, until he was able to place his hand upon his own property. This bold endeavour brought Madame to her feet and drawing the king's dagger, "What would you with me?" she cried.

"Everything," answered he.

"Ha! I should be a great fool to give myself against my inclination! If you fancied you would find my virtue unarmed you made a great error. Behold the poniard of the king, with which I will kill you if you make the semblance of a step towards me."

So saying, she took a cinder, and having still her eyes upon her lord she drew a circle on the floor, adding, "These are the confines of the king's domain. Beware how you pass them."

The advocate, with whose ideas of love-making the dagger sadly interfered, stood quite discomfited, but at the same time he heard the cruel speech of his tormentor he caught sight through the slits and tears in her robe of a sweet sample of a plump white thigh, and such voluptuous specimens of hidden mysteries, et cetera, that death seemed sweet to him if he could only taste of them a little. So that he rushed within the domain of the king, saying, "I mind not death." In fact he came with such force that his charmer fell backwards onto the bed, but keeping her presence of mind she defended herself so gallantly that the advocate enjoyed no further advantage than a knock at the door that would not admit him, and he gained as well a little stab from the poniard which did not wound him deeply, so that it did not cost him very dearly, his attack upon the realm of his sovereign. But maddened with this slight advantage, he cried, "I cannot live without the possession of that lovely body, and those marvels of love. Kill me then!" And again he attacked the royal preserves. The young beauty, whose head was full of the king, was not even touched by this great love, said gravely, "If you menace me further, it is not you but myself I will kill." She glared at him so savagely that the poor man was quite terrified, and commenced to deplore the evil hour in which he had taken her to wife, and thus the night which should have been so joyous, was passed in tears, lamentations, prayers, and ejaculations. In vain he tempted her with promises; she should eat out of gold, she should be a great lady, he would buy houses and lands for her. Oh! if she would only let him break one lance with her in the sweet conflict of love, he would leave her for ever and pass the remainder of his life according to her fantasy. But she, still unyielding, said she would permit him to die, and that was the only thing he could do to please her.

"I have not deceived you," said she. "Agreeable to my promise, I shall give myself to the king, making you a present of the peddler, chance

passers, and street loungers with whom I threatened you.”

When the day broke she put on her wedding garments and waited patiently till the poor husband had to depart to his office client’s business, and then ran out into the town to seek the king. But she had not gone a bow-shot from the house before one of the king’s servants who had watched the house from dawn, stopped her with the question--

“Do you seek the king?”

“Yes,” said she.

“Good; then allow me to be your good friend,” said the subtle courtier. “I ask your aid and protection, as now I give you mine.”

With that he told her what sort of a man the king was, which was his weak side, that he was passionate one day and silent the next, that she would luxuriously lodged and well kept, but that she must keep the king well in hand; in short, he chatted so pleasantly that the time passed quickly until she found herself in the Hotel de l’Hirundelle where afterwards lived Madame d’Estampes. The poor husband shed scalding tears, when he found his little bird had flown, and became melancholy and pensive. His friends and neighbours edified his ears with as many taunts and jeers as Saint Jacques had the honour of receiving in Compostella, but the poor fellow took it so to heart, that at last they tried rather to assuage his grief. These artful compeers by a species of legal chicanery, decreed that the good man was not a cuckold, seeing that his wife had refused a consummation, and if the planter of horns had been anyone but the king, the said marriage might have been dissolved; but the amorous spouse was wretched unto death at my lady’s trick. However, he left her to the king, determining one day to have her to himself, and thinking that a life-long shame would not be too dear a payment for a night with her. One must love well to love like that, eh? and there are many worldly ones, who mock at such affection. But he, still thinking of her, neglected his cases and his clients, his robberies and everything. He went to the palace like a miser searching for a lost sixpence, bowed down, melancholy, and absent-minded, so much so, that one day he relieved himself against the robe of a counsellor, believing all the while he stood against a wall. Meanwhile the beautiful girl was loved night and day by the king, who could not tear himself from her embraces, because in amorous play she was so excellent, knowing as well how to fan the flame of love as to extinguish it--to-day snubbing him, to-morrow petting him, never the same, and with it a thousand little tricks to charm the ardent lover.

A lord of Bridore killed himself through her, because she would not receive his embraces, although he offered her his land, Bridore in Touraine. Of these gallants of Touraine, who gave an estate for one

tilt with love's lance, there are none left. This death made the fair one sad, and since her confessor laid the blame of it upon her, she determined for the future to accept all domains and secretly ease their owner's amorous pains for the better saving of their souls from perdition. 'Twas thus she commenced to build up that great fortune which made her a person of consideration in the town. By this means she prevented many gallant gentlemen from perishing, playing her game so well, and inventing such fine stories, that his Majesty little guessed how much she aided him in securing the happiness of his subjects. The fact is, she has such a hold over him that she could have made him believe the floor was the ceiling, which was perhaps easier for him to think than anyone else seeing that at the Rue d'Hirundelle my lord king passed the greater portion of his time embracing her always as though he would see if such a lovely article would wear away: but he wore himself out first, poor man, seeing that he eventually died from excess of love. Although she took care to grant her favours only to the best and noblest in the court, and that such occasions were rare as miracles, there were not wanting those among her enemies and rivals who declared that for 10,000 crowns a simple gentleman might taste the pleasures of his sovereign, which was false above all falseness, for when her lord taxed her with it, did she not reply, "Abominable wretches! Curse the devils who put this idea in your head! I never yet did have man who spent less than 30,000 crowns upon me."

The king, although vexed could not repress a smile, and kept her on a month to silence scandal. And last, la demoiselle de Pisseleu, anxious to obtain her place, brought about her ruin. Many would have liked to be ruined in the same way, seeing she was taken by a young lord, was happy with him, the fires of love in her being still unquenched. But to take up the thread again. One day that the king's sweetheart was passing through the town in her litter to buy laces, furs, velvets, broideries, and other ammunition, and so charmingly attired, and looking so lovely, that anyone, especially the clerks, would have believed the heavens were open above them, behold, her good man, who comes upon her near the old cross. She, at that time lazily swinging her charming little foot over the side of the litter, drew in her head as though she had seen an adder. She was a good wife, for I know some who would have proudly passed their husbands, to their shame and to the great disrespect of conjugal rights.

"What is the matter?" asked one M. de Lannoy, who humbly accompanied her.

"Nothing," she whispered; "but that person is my husband. Poor man, how changed he looks. Formerly he was the picture of a monkey; today he is the very image of a Job."

The poor advocate stood opened-mouthed. His heart beat rapidly at the

sight of that little foot--of that wife so wildly loved.

Observing which, the Sire de Lannoy said to him, with courtly innocence--

“If you are her husband, is that any reason you should stop her passage?”

At this she burst out laughing, and the good husband instead of killing her bravely, shed scalding tears at that laugh which pierced his heart, his soul, his everything, so much that he nearly tumbled over an old citizen whom the sight of the king's sweetheart had driven against the wall. The aspect of this weak flower, which had been his in the bud, but far from him had spread its lovely leaves; of the fairy figure, the voluptuous bust--all this made the poor advocate more wretched and more mad for her than it is possible to express in words. You must have been madly in love with a woman who refuses your advances thoroughly to understand the agony of this unhappy man. Rare indeed is it to be so infatuated as he was. He swore that life, fortune, honour--all might go, but that for once at least he would be flesh-to-flesh with her, and make so grand a repast off her dainty body as would suffice him all his life. He passed the night saying, “oh yes; ah! I'll have her!” and “Curses am I not her husband?” and “Devil take me,” striking himself on the forehead and tossing about. There are chances and occasions which occur so opportunely in this world that little-minded men refuse them credence, saying they are supernatural, but men of high intellect know them to be true because they could not be invented. One of the chances came to the poor advocate, even the day after that terrible one which had been so sore a trial to him. One of his clients, a man of good renown, who had his audiences with the king, came one morning to the advocate, saying that he required immediately a large sum of money, about 12,000 crowns. To which the artful fellow replied, 12,000 crowns were not so often met at the corner of a street as that which often is seen at the corner of the street; that besides the sureties and guarantees of interest, it was necessary to find a man who had about him 12,000 crowns, and that those gentlemen were not numerous in Paris, big city as it was, and various other things of a like character the man of cunning remarked.

“Is it true, my lord, the you have a hungry and relentless creditor?” said he.

“Yes, yes,” replied the other, “it concerns the mistress of the king. Don't breathe a syllable; but this evening, in consideration of 20,000 crowns and my domain of Brie, I shall take her measure.”

Upon this the advocate blanched, and the courtier perceived he touched a tender point. As he had only lately returned from the wars, he did not know that the lovely woman adored by the king had a husband.

“You appear ill,” he said.

“I have a fever,” replied the knave. “But is it to her that you give the contract and the money?”

“Yes.”

“Who then manages the bargain? Is it she also?”

“No,” said the noble; “her little arrangements are concluded through a servant of hers, the cleverest little ladies’-maid that ever was. She’s sharper than mustard, and these nights stolen from the king have lined her pockets well.”

“I know a Lombard who would accommodate you. But nothing can be done; of the 12,000 crowns you shall not have a brass farthing if this same ladies’-maid does not come here to take the price of the article that is so great an alchemist that turns blood into gold, by Heaven!”

“It will be a good trick to make her sign the receipt,” replied the lord, laughing.

The servant came faithfully to the rendezvous with the advocate, who had begged the lord to bring her. The ducats looked bright and beautiful. There they lay all in a row, like nuns going to vespers. Spread out upon the table they would have made a donkey smile, even if he were being gutted alive; so lovely, so splendid, were those brave noble young piles. The good advocate, however, had prepared this view for no ass, for the little handmaiden look longingly at the golden heap, and muttered a prayer at the sight of them. Seeing which, the husband whispered in her ear his golden words, “These are for you.”

“Ah!” said she; “I have never been so well paid.”

“My dear,” replied the dear man, “you shall have them without being troubled with me;” and turning her round, “Your client has not told you who I am, eh? No? Learn then, I am the husband of the lady whom the king has debauched, and whom you serve. Carry her these crowns, and come back here. I will hand over yours to you on a condition which will be to your taste.”

The servant did as she was bidden, and being very curious to know how she could get 12,000 crowns without sleeping with the advocate, was very soon back again.

“Now, my little one,” said he, “here are 12,000 crowns. With this sum I could buy lands, men, women, and the conscience of three priests at least; so that I believe if I give it to you I can have you, body,

soul, and toe nails. And I shall have faith in you like an advocate, I expect that you will go to the lord who expects to pass the night with my wife, and you will deceive him, by telling him that the king is coming to supper with her, and that to-night he must seek his little amusements elsewhere. By so doing I shall be able to take his place and the king's."

"But how?" said she.

"Oh!" replied he; "I have bought you, you and your tricks. You won't have to look at these crowns twice without finding me a way to have my wife. In bringing this conjunction about you commit no sin. It is a work of piety to bring together two people whose hands only been put one in to the other, and that by the priest."

"By my faith, come," said she; "after supper the lights will be put out, and you can enjoy Madame if you remain silent. Luckily, on these joyful occasions she cries more than she speaks, and asks questions with her hands alone, for she is very modest, and does not like loose jokes, like the ladies of the Court."

"Oh," cried the advocate, "look, take the 12,000 crowns, and I promise you twice as much more if I get by fraud that which belongs to me by right."

Then he arranged the hour, the door, the signal, and all; and the servant went away, bearing with her on the back of the mules the golden treasure wrung by fraud and trickery from the widow and the orphan, and they were all going to that place where everything goes--save our lives, which come from it. Now behold my advocate, who shaves himself, scents himself, goes without onions for dinner that his breath may be sweet, and does everything to make himself as presentable as a gallant signor. He gives himself the airs of a young dandy, tries to be lithe and frisky and to disguise his ugly face; he might try all he knew, he always smelt of the musty lawyer. He was not so clever as the pretty washerwoman of Portillon who one day wishing to appear at her best before one of her lovers, got rid of a disagreeable odour in a manner well known to young women of an inventive turn of mind. But our crafty fellow fancied himself the nicest man in the world, although in spite of his drugs and perfumes he was really the nastiest. He dressed himself in his thinnest clothes although the cold pinched him like a rope collar and sallied forth, quickly gaining the Rue d'Hirundelle. There he had to wait some time. But just as he was beginning to think he had been made a fool of, and just as it was quite dark, the maid came down and opened alike the door to him and good husband slipped gleefully into the king's apartment. The girl locked him carefully in a cupboard that was close to his wife's bed, and through a crack he feasted his eyes upon her beauty, for she undressed herself before the fire, and put on a thin

nightgown, through which her charms were plainly visible. Believing herself alone with her maid she made those little jokes that women will when undressing. "Am I not worth 20,000 crowns to-night? Is that overpaid with a castle in Brie?"

And saying this she gently raised two white supports, firm as rocks, which had well sustained many assaults, seeing they had been furiously attacked and had not softened. "My shoulders alone are worth a kingdom; no king could make their equal. But I am tired of this life. That which is hard work is no pleasure." The little maid smiled, and her lovely mistress said to her, "I should like to see you in my place." Then the maid laughed, saying--

"Be quiet, Madame, he is there."

"Who?"

"Your husband."

"Which?"

"The real one."

"Chut!" said Madame.

And her maid told her the whole story, wishing to keep her favour and the 12,000 crowns as well.

"Oh well, he shall have his money's worth. I'll give his desires time to cool. If he tastes me may I lose my beauty and become as ugly as a monkey's baby. You get into bed in my place and thus gain the 12,000 crowns. Go and tell him that he must take himself off early in the morning in order that I may not find out your trick upon me, and just before dawn I will get in by his side."

The poor husband was freezing and his teeth were chattering, and the chambermaid coming to the cupboard on pretence of getting some linen, said to him, "Your hour of bliss approaches. Madame to-night has made grand preparations and you will be well served. But work without whistling, otherwise I shall be lost."

At last, when the good husband was on the point of perishing with cold, the lights were put out. The maid cried softly in the curtains to the king's sweetheart, that his lordship was there, and jumped into bed, while her mistress went out as if she had been the chambermaid. The advocate, released from his cold hiding-place, rolled rapturously into the warm sheets, thinking to himself, "Oh! this is good!" To tell the truth, the maid gave him his money's worth--and the good man thought of the difference between the profusion of the royal houses

and the niggardly ways of the citizens' wives. The servant laughing, played her part marvellously well, regaling the knave with gentle cries, shiverings, convulsions and tossings about, like a newly-caught fish on the grass, giving little Ah! Ahs! in default of other words; and as often as the request was made by her, so often was it complied with by the advocate, who dropped off to sleep at last, like an empty pocket. But before finishing, the lover who wished to preserve a souvenir of this sweet night of love, by a dextrous turn, plucked out one of his wife's hairs, where from I know not, seeing I was not there, and kept in his hand this precious gauge of the warm virtue of that lovely creature. Towards the morning, when the cock crew, the wife slipped in beside her husband, and pretended to sleep. Then the maid tapped gently on the happy man's forehead, whispering in his ear, "It is time, get into your clothes and off you go--it's daylight." The good man grieved to lose his treasure, and wished to see the source of his vanished happiness.

"Oh! Oh!" said he, proceeding to compare certain things, "I've got light hair, and this is dark."

"What have you done?" said the servant; "Madame will see she has been duped."

"But look."

"Ah!" said she, with an air of disdain, "do you not know, you who knows everything, that that which is plucked dies and discolours?" and thereupon roaring with laughter at the good joke, she pushed him out of doors. This became known. The poor advocate, named Feron, died of shame, seeing that he was the only one who had not his own wife while she, who was from this was called La Belle Feroniere, married, after leaving the king, a young lord, Count of Buzancois. And in her old days she would relate the story, laughingly adding, that she had never scented the knave's flavour.

This teaches us not to attach ourselves more than we can help to wives who refuse to support our yoke.

THE SCISSORS-GRINDER

The Project Gutenberg eBook, *From the Heart of Israel*, by Bernard Drachman

“Scissors to grind! Knives, axes, or saws to sharpen! Everything made as sharp as new!” This is the cry, uttered in a clear and cheerful voice, which is frequently heard in the alleys and back yards as well as the streets and avenues of that vast and densely populated section of the American metropolis known as the great East Side. The man who utters it is an unusually agreeable, as well as active and energetic, representative of the classic trade of scissors-grinding. He is a pleasant-faced, good-humored young fellow, with light-brown hair and rounded, open countenance, from which a pair of bright blue eyes gaze at you with a frank and sympathetic expression. His shabby clothes hang most gracefully on his lithe and erect, not over tall figure; his motions have a sort of trained elegance about them, and when he stands before you with his grinding machine on his back, he seems not so much an humble sharpener of domestic utensils, but rather some strange sort of soldier, and the machine upon his back some peculiar and unusual engine of warfare. He is very well liked in the entire district, and his popularity brings in sufficient trade to insure him a very fair living. When his clear and musical cry is heard anywhere in the neighborhood, the customers pour forth from the many-storied tenements, the cellar dwellings (I had almost written cave dwellings, which term would hardly have rendered me liable to a suit for libel if I had used it), and the little shops and stalls which abound everywhere in the vicinity. Soon he is surrounded by a motley throng—Jews, Italians, Poles, Bohemians, men, women, and children, all sorts and conditions of mankind—who bring him a miscellaneous collection of invalid table knives, dilapidated carving knives, superannuated scissors, and antediluvian saws, all of which he is expected to heal and to restore to their pristine brightness and sharpness.

[Illustration:

THE SCISSORS GRINDER

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But, though our friend is well known and popular in the district, he is nevertheless unknown. By this paradoxical statement is meant that, although the scissors-grinder is personally a familiar and well-esteemed figure, nothing is known by the vast bulk of his constituents and customers of his connections, his history, or his antecedents. This is nothing strange or unusual in that section. People are not, as a rule, curious concerning each other on the East Side. The inhabitants are mostly not native to the soil, but are a chance aggregation from all the countries of the civilized world, driven from their native habitats by

the storm and stress of harsh experiences and brought together in the New World by the glittering attractions of the Golden Land. It is not always advisable under such circumstances to be over-inquisitive concerning the past history of one's neighbors and friends, and therefore the dwellers on the East Side are discreetly devoid of curiosity, and are quite content if the people with whom they associate are, in their present stage of life, decent and well behaved. That is why no one knows (or knew until recently) anything about the scissors-grinder—his history, his family, or even his name. Nevertheless his story came out some time ago, and it proved to be, what no one would have anticipated from the scissors-grinder's blithe and pleasant appearance, a real moral tragedy, a tale of blind, mediæval oppression, of high ambition suddenly blasted, of strange and sublime heroism. It came out through Mendel Greenberger.

Mendel, who keeps a little optician shop in Orchard Street near Grand, is considerable of a character himself, and, unlike the majority of the denizens of the region, is gifted with a lively curiosity concerning the persons with whom he comes in contact. Mendel has travelled pretty much all over the world, and has acquired in the course of his wanderings the knowledge of a dozen or more languages and of at least three trades. But what he most prides himself on is his _menschenkenntniss_, that is, his ability to recognize at a glance the origin of strangers whom he sees for the first time, and to classify them according to the racial, religious, and social elements or subdivisions thereof to which they belong. This he infers from the appearance, conduct, and speech of the individuals concerned, and, in particularly interesting cases, he manages to have them reveal their names and other personal details of interest, but without asking direct questions, which he thinks impertinent.

When the scissors-grinder began to come into the neighborhood and Mendel began to give him employment in his vocation, he at once recognized that here was an interesting and extremely puzzling personality. It was a real problem of the kind Mendel Greenberger loved to solve, but it defied his powers of analysis and classification. For the life of him he could not make out who or what the handsome, pleasant-spoken young man, with the lowly trade apparently so unsuited for him, was. His type was absolutely non-distinctive. As far as appearance went there was no telling whether he was Jew or Gentile, and no reason to assign him to any one European nation rather than another. His conduct and manner were just as little guide, for, though polite and manifestly well-bred, he had no mannerisms of any kind. Baffled by his inability to "locate" his new acquaintance by these usually infallible indications, Mendel resorted to the expedient of addressing him in various languages. But here Mendel "tripped up," so to speak, even more emphatically than before. The scissors-grinder spoke, with one exception, every European language which Mendel did, but with superior accent and correcter grammar. His English was that of one to the manner born, though devoid

of either Cockney accent or Yankee twang; his French would have done credit to any *boulevardier*; his German was as faultlessly exact in construction and pronunciation as that of any compatriot of Goethe or Schiller; and as for Italian, Spanish, Russian, Polish, and Hungarian, to say nothing of the minor tongues, Bohemian, Roumanian, Servian, Greek, Turkish, he spoke them all with perfect ease and fluency. It mattered not in what tongue the puzzled Mendel addressed him, the scissors-grinder always answered in the same, but without betraying any surprise and as though it were the natural and to-be-expected thing to speak any and every idiom in existence. But, as already stated, there was one exception to the polyglot ability of the scissors-grinder. He did not know Yiddish, for when Mendel addressed him in that tongue, he did not understand him well and answered in German, the tongue most nearly related to the dialect of the Jews of the Slavonic lands, and without using any Hebrew words or phrases with which even the German Jews habitually interlard their speech. Mendel had to confess to himself that the scissors-grinder was an enigma, which even he, with his great knowledge of human beings, could not solve. Of two things, however, he felt certain: first, that the scissors-grinder was originally of far higher social station than his humble vocation would suggest, for his manners and bearing, and, above all, his extraordinary linguistic attainments, were only explainable on the ground of refined surroundings and the best of education; secondly, that he was no Jew, for his ignorance of Yiddish and Hebrew and his manifest unfamiliarity with Jewish ideas and usages showed conclusively that he had had no Jewish bringing up nor had ever associated intimately with Jewish circles.

Mendel at first conjectured that the scissors-grinder was a nobleman of some European nation, who had been compelled to leave his native land for a political or other reason, and was obliged to support himself by his own labor in exile. Noblemen in exile do not, however, usually select a vocation requiring as much skill and industry and withal so low in the social scale as scissors-grinding, so on second thought Mendel abandoned this conjecture as untenable, and, not being able to set up any more satisfactory one, found himself, as far as this question was concerned, *vis à vis de rien*. Not feeling able to remain in this condition, he cast about for other means of solving the problem and gratifying his curiosity. He determined to ask the scissors-grinder's name. Names, it is true, may be assumed, but Mendel thought that even an assumed name would be some sort of clew to its bearer's identity, for it would, at least, indicate to what nation or class the bearer considered himself and desired to have others consider him as belonging. Accordingly when next the scissors-grinder appeared in the neighborhood of Mendel's shop and was bringing back finely renovated the penknife which Mendel had given him to sharpen, the latter remarked: "Fine weather we are having to-day, Mr. ——!" and paused with expectant air.

"My name," said the scissors-grinder quietly, "is Eliezer Schwartzfeld."

Mendel gazed at him in undisguised astonishment. "That sounds extremely Jewish," he said. "You are not one of the chosen people, are you?"

"Yes, I am a Jew," answered the scissors-grinder, with just a suggestion of a smile at Mendel's evident surprise; "a Russian Jew at that, too."

Mendel's astonishment increased to a degree that was absolutely comical. Here was an utterly inexplicable case. It was not that the scissors-grinder's physiognomy did not contain a feature that suggested the Semite—that was common enough, especially among Russian Jews; but what might be called the psychology of the case was utterly baffling to Mendel. He had often met Jews that were well educated and spoke a number of languages with fluency, but in all his experience he had never come across one who had not at least some, however slight, acquaintance with the Jewish mother tongues, Yiddish or Hebrew. He had frequently come in contact with Jews, well and gently reared in their native lands, who had been forced by adverse circumstances to earn their bread by humble labor in America; but they had invariably found employment in some one of the so-called "Jewish" branches of industry, tailoring, cloak-making, cigar-packing, or the like, which open at least the door to a future as an independent manufacturer or merchant. But something so plebeian and hopeless as scissors-grinding, and embraced, too, by a man of evident refinement—why, that was utterly anomalous, unheard of! He gazed at the scissors-grinder without uttering a word, but with eyes which told unmistakably their tale of amazement.

"You are surprised," said the latter, "I suppose, because I, though a Jew, do not speak Yiddish, and because I found nothing better to do than to sharpen scissors and knives. Let me tell you my story and you will wonder no longer. I can recollect very little of my earliest childhood. My mother must have died, I think, when I was hardly more than an infant, for all I can recollect of her is a picture, very dim and faint, of a sweet, motherly face bending over me and of a tender, loving voice calling me darling and dove. My father, too, must have left this earth when I was only about four or five years of age. My memories of him, too, are few and indistinct. I can recall that I was a very small child in charge of an old, cross-tempered woman, a Jewess, I think, who treated me with a strange alternation of cruelty and kindness. My father used to visit me at rare intervals in this place, and bring me sweetmeats and little presents, and I can remember that on these occasions he was always dressed in a brilliant uniform, which filled my childish heart with admiration and awe. My most distinct recollection concerning my father is of the circumstances attending his death. He was brought to the house one day with blood-stained bandages around his head and breast and with face ghastly pale. They laid him upon a couch, and for several days physicians came to treat him, and men dressed in even brighter and finer uniforms than his came to visit him, and some of them chucked me under the chin and called me a fine little fellow. Then one day he called me to his bedside and said to me, in such a faint voice

that I had to put my ear to his mouth in order to catch his words: 'Eliezer, my darling boy, I am going to die and must leave you alone in the world. But I have spoken to good people, and they have promised me to care for you and to see that you are educated to become what your father was—a soldier—but a higher and nobler one than he could be. Always be good and honorable in all your doings, and above all, my son, never forget, wherever you may be or whatever you may become, that you are a Jew, as your father was, and never permit anything to swerve you from your faithfulness to the holy traditions of our religion and people.' Then he kissed me on my brow, and, child though I was, I knew that something dreadful was going to happen, and burst forth into an agony of bitter weeping that shook my little frame convulsively. That same night he died, and the day after the next he was taken away in the midst of a great concourse of people, among whom were many Jewish men and women whom I knew not, and who wept and cried aloud as they accompanied the funeral procession. There was also a long line of soldiers, who marched with flags draped and guns reversed, and in front of whom went musicians and drummers with crape-covered drums, who played together a sad, funereal strain as they marched. I was left behind, gazing out of the window at the funeral procession as long as it was in sight, weeping as though my very heart would break and feeling that I was left all alone now in the world, without friend, protector, or well-wisher. But the same afternoon a kindly spoken, friendly looking officer, attired in a brilliant uniform, came to my lodgings, told the old woman who had charge of me that he was Col. Ivan Mentchikoff, and that he had been appointed legal guardian of Corporal Schwartzfeld's son and had come to take me away. I noticed that the old woman did not seem satisfied, and grumbled something to herself with a discontented air, but she did not audibly object, but took the money which the colonel offered her. She then packed together my little belongings, carried them down to the carriage which was waiting at the door, and the colonel and I entered and drove off to the railroad station, whence we left for the colonel's home, which was in the town of Yellisavetgrad, many miles away. I remained with the family of the colonel for eight or nine years. I was treated with the utmost kindness—in fact, in all regards, except one, exactly like the children of the family. Colonel Mentchikoff was very particular in regard to the education of his children. He kept the best of private tutors for all subjects, and was especially insistent that they should learn all the chief European languages, a knowledge of which, he declared, was essential to a Russian gentleman. I had, of course, the advantage of all this, the same as all the others, and I quickly discovered that I had a special linguistic talent, and, while I easily kept pace with the Mentchikoff boys and girls in all the subjects of instruction generally, as regards the acquisition of languages I was so superior that I could not be compared with them at all. It was no trouble at all to me to acquire a new language; the forms seemed to impress themselves naturally on my mind, and my memory retained with the greatest ease the multitudes of new terms and expressions which each tongue presented.

[Illustration:

I WAS LEFT BEHIND, GAZING OUT OF THE WINDOW AT THE FUNERAL PROCESSION.

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“The point in which my education differed from that of my companions was that of religion. Colonel Mentchikoff was a zealous adherent of the Greek Church, and insisted that his children should be instructed in its doctrine, and also that they should attend worship regularly in the beautiful church of the town. I was exempted from both these requirements, but, as he did not forbid my attendance at them, I formed the habit of being of my own accord present at the lessons in religion which a certain pope gave them twice weekly, and I was frequently present at service in the church on Sundays and feast days. Hebrew instruction I did not receive, and was, to my shame I must confess, utterly ignorant of the teachings of the religion in which I was born and to which my father, on his dying bed, had adjured me to be faithful. I did not, however, feel at all attracted to the teachings of Greek Christianity. My attendance at church and lessons was induced solely by curiosity, and I often found myself smiling contemptuously at the things my companions were obliged to learn and believe. As I knew and kept nothing of Judaism either, I suppose I must have been classed at that time as a youthful heathen.

“After I had been about two years in Colonel Mentchikoff’s house he told me my father’s story and the reason why he, the colonel, was so friendly to me. My father, it seems, had been a soldier in the Russian army most of his life, and had attracted attention because of his gallantry and fidelity. He had taken part in many battles in the Caucasus and had risen to the rank of corporal, which was as high as an uneducated man and a Jew could aspire. In a fierce hand-to-hand struggle in one of those battles he had saved the life of Colonel Mentchikoff, who had then, impelled by gratitude, asked him in what way he could recompense him for the great service he had rendered him. My father, blessed be his memory, who was as unassuming and modest as he was brave, answered that he desired no recompense for himself, as he had only done his duty in defending his commander, but that he had an only child, a son, whose mother had died while he was yet an infant, and that he, my father, desired, in case he met his death in the war, that the colonel should see that the boy was cared for and properly educated, and if in future years the intolerant laws should be changed and it would be permitted to Jews to become military officers, that he should endeavor to have him admitted to the military academy and prepared for the martial career. All this the colonel had willingly promised, and thought it but a slight reward for the savior of his life.

“Shortly after my father received his death wound at the hand of one of

the savage warriors of the Caucasus. He was brought, at his own urgent request, to the house where his little son was living in charge of an old nurse, to pass the few remaining days of his existence; and when he had died he received, in consideration of his exceptional merit, the distinguished honor of a great military funeral. The colonel, had then taken formal charge of me, and ever since I had resided in his home. The colonel assured me that he loved me dearly, for the sake of my father, whose memory he held sacred, and that he would do all in his power to promote my welfare and to assist me to embrace the military career as my father had desired. He was as good as his word. Until my fourteenth year he cared for me in the most liberal and kind-hearted manner, providing equally well for my physical and intellectual needs, and then, since I had reached the age when youths, intending to take up the military career must begin their studies, he procured my admission into the Imperial Military Academy at St. Petersburg. The illiberal laws prohibiting the conferring of commissions on Hebrews had not, it is true, been formally abrogated, but the spirit of tolerance was abroad in the land; it was in the days of the good Czar Alexander II., who had in so many ways alleviated the lot of all the oppressed peoples of his realm, and so my kind protector and guardian met with no difficulties or discouragements in seeking my admission into the academy. On the contrary, the officials of the institution were exceedingly kind and sympathetic. They received me with open arms as the orphan son of the gallant Corporal Schwartzfeld, of whose heroic record they were well aware, and as the ward of the well-connected and influential Colonel Mentchikoff. The fact of my being a Hebrew was hardly referred to, or, if any casual mention thereof was made, it was accompanied with the statement that that would undoubtedly make no difference in my case, and that, in view of my exceptional recommendations, I need anticipate no difficulty in obtaining a satisfactory appointment when once I had completed my course.

“I took leave of my benefactors with tears and embraces—and to this day I cannot think of Colonel Mentchikoff and his good, kind family without being deeply moved, for they were noble, true-hearted people, and very good to me—and took up my studies at the military academy. I will not refer at length to my career at the military academy, for now it makes no difference whether I did well or poorly, and, besides, it were foolish for the poor scissors-grinder to boast of the past glories of his life. Suffice it to say that I more than held my own in every branch of instruction, and made, besides, a specialty of three subjects. I devoted myself with great zeal to the pursuit of military engineering and languages, and also sought to acquire an expert knowledge of the manufacture and preparation of weapons, both of those which cut and those which discharge projectiles. The latter two branches of knowledge I pursued with the idea that they would be particularly useful if ever I became a member of the general staff or obtained some high military political post, when a knowledge of languages, particularly of the Slavonic tongues, and ability to criticise the quality of weapons

furnished to the army would be invaluable. I thought of myself as a soldier, and a soldier only. To other matters I hardly devoted a thought, so absorbed was I in my preparations for my prospective vocation—least of all to religious loyalty or Hebraic traditions. During all the seven years of my attendance at the military academy I never entered a synagogue—in fact, I would not have known what to do had I gone there, for I was utterly ignorant of Hebrew and knew nothing of the mode or manner of worship among the Jews; I never kept a Jewish holiday, never was present at a religious gathering of any kind, for I had given up also my former curiosity concerning Christianity; I did not associate with or even know any Hebrew; in short, to all intents and purposes, I forgot that I was a Jew or had any need to consider the question of my relation to my ancestral faith, and my friends and colleagues at the academy, who were all very liberal-minded and tolerant, did not remind me of it in any way. Personally I was popular with both teachers and students, and, when the last year of the course began, I received an unofficial intimation from the faculty that, on account of my exceptional proficiency in technical matters, I would be recommended for appointment after graduation as a captain of engineers.

“At last the day of days, long looked for—commencement—arrived. I had passed a splendid examination and was designated valedictorian of the class. The great _aula_ or hall of the academy was filled to overflowing with a brilliant and distinguished assemblage, among them brave men and fair women, bearers of the proudest and most ancient names in Russia. At the front of the hall facing the stage sat, in two long rows, the graduates, in their natty uniforms, among them myself. At the front of the stage, at a table on which were flowers, the graduates’ diplomas, and other papers, sat the venerable General Popoff, president of the academy, and behind him the faculty and a large number of honored visitors. Just before the hour appointed for the beginning of the ceremonies, an orderly entered the hall, strode up to General Popoff, saluted in regulation military fashion, handed him a note, saluted again, and retired. I do not know why it was, but a shiver of apprehension went through me as I saw this action. I felt instinctively that it concerned me and boded me no good. The General opened the letter, my eyes mustering him painfully the while, and I could see him start as he read its contents. For a moment he sat with his head resting on his hands, evidently plunged in deep thought. Then he summoned an attendant and spoke a few words to him. A moment later the attendant stood at my side.

“‘The General desires to speak to you in the room at the side of the stage,’ he said.

“The hot blood surged impetuously to my head and my heart beat violently as I entered the room whither I had been summoned. General Popoff was already in and looked at me pityingly as I entered. ‘At your command, General,’ I said, concealing my agitation with a mighty effort and

saluting stiffly. The General did not answer, but handed me a paper, evidently the letter which he had just received. It was an official communication, bore the governmental seal, and read as follows:

““MINISTRY OF WAR.

““ _To General Alexei Popoff, President of the Imperial Military Academy._

““SIR: The receipt of your report certifying to the cadets entitled to graduation and recommending the same to various appointments in the army is hereby acknowledged. The same is approved, and you are authorized to issue certificates of graduation to all the cadets therein named, with the exception of Cadet Schwartzfeld. In his case there appears to be some doubt whether he has been properly baptized in the Orthodox Church, and you are hereby ordered to withhold his certificate until you have convinced yourself that such is the case.

““In the name of the Minister,

““KRASNEWITZ, _Secretary_.’

“I read the note through two or three times. Its contents seemed to burn themselves with letters of fire into my brain. I looked at the General. He did not say anything and appeared deeply agitated. At last I forced myself to address him, and my voice sounded strangely harsh and metallic as I spoke:

““What is to be done in this matter, your Excellency?’ I said.

““My dear boy,’ said the General, and the true note of sympathy rang in his voice, ‘I sent in my report over a month ago, and, not receiving any answer, I thought everything was well and that I could go ahead. I did not think this would happen. There is only one thing that you can do. You must go and have yourself baptized in the orthodox faith, or else you can receive neither your certificate nor your appointment, and your career is at an end.’

““But how about this evening’s affair?’ I said, and the whole world seemed reeling about me. ‘Am I not to receive my certificate? Am I not to deliver my valedictory?’

““Strictly speaking, you should not be permitted to do either,’ said the General, and his voice sounded even more sympathetic than before; ‘but I should be sorry to see you suffer public humiliation. I will tell you what I can do. If you will promise me that to-morrow you will go and be

baptized, I will accept your word of honor and you shall receive your certificate and deliver your address. But you must answer me at once,' and he glanced at his watch, 'for the hour is growing late and the proceedings must soon begin.'

"My brain seemed to become paralyzed and to lose all power of thought as I listened to the General's words, kindly spoken, but, oh, so bitter to me. My heart struck at my breast as though it would burst its confines. I longed to give the answer the General desired, but the figure of my dying father, lying outstretched upon his couch of suffering, rose suddenly before me; again I saw his pale face and blood-stained bandages, and again I heard his faint voice saying, 'Above all, my son, never forget that you are a Jew, and never permit anything to swerve you from your faithfulness to the holy traditions of our religion and people'—and I could not.

"I cannot give you that promise now, your Excellency,' I said, in a broken voice, whose agonized groaning was perceptible even to me. 'I must have time to think over the matter.'

"In that case,' said the General, and his voice sounded distinctly harder, 'I must ask you to leave the hall, where your presence has become improper; and any time you are ready to take the necessary steps you can notify me, and I will see to it that you receive your certificate and appointment.'

"I saluted and retired. I went to my seat, took my military cap, and, without saying a word to my fellow-students, at once left the hall, though I could not fail to notice the buzz of astonishment from both cadets and audience as I strode through the aisle toward the door. That night on my couch I fought a fiercer battle than any in which I could ever have taken part had I been privileged to enter upon my projected career. Two opposing forces were arrayed against each other and contended fiercely—on the one side self-interest and the disappointment, naturally intense, at seeing an ardently desired career thus cruelly cut off, nipped not even in the bud; on the other side filial devotion and a newly awakened sense of racial and religious loyalty. The one said: 'Why ruin yourself? What does Judaism concern you? You have never observed its precepts. Let them sprinkle the three drops over you. It is only the ticket of admission to your future. Inwardly you can remain as you are.' The other said little. It was only the pale face of my dying father and his faint voice speaking: 'Above all, my son, never forget that you are a Jew, and never permit anything to swerve you from your faithfulness to the holy traditions of our religion and people.'

"All night long the battle raged, while I tossed on my weary couch and never closed an eye; but when the early morning light stole through my lattice, my father had won the victory. I rose, hastily made my toilet, and wrote a letter to the General, informing him that my decision had

been made to remain loyal to my faith, even at the cost of my career. On the same day I packed together my belongings and left forever that Russia that had grown hateful to me. I sailed at once for America, the land where men are free and where the State does not ask what is a man's descent or religion before permitting him to consecrate his services to it. In New York I found that my talents and knowledge did not avail in securing a position. Every place seemed filled and there was no lack of people of education looking unsuccessfully for work. But, fortunately, I understood the art of sharpening and tempering steel blades, and thus I became a knife-sharpener and scissors-grinder, and manage to support myself. Now you know why I am in New York, a scissors-grinder and a Jew, instead of being in Russia, a captain of engineers and a Christian. Can I sharpen anything else for you to-day? No, next time; all right, good-bye."

And the scissors-grinder went forth in search of other customers, merrily whistling the while and leaving Mendel Greenberger behind, plunged in deep reflection.

THE TOAD

by Vicente Blasco Ibáñez

Translator: Isaac Goldberg

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"I WAS spending the summer at Nazaret," said my friend Orduna, "a little fishermen's town near Valencia. The women went to the city to sell the fish, the men sailed about in their boats with triangular sails, or tugged at their nets on the beach; we summer vacationists spent the day sleeping and the night at the doors of our houses, contemplating the phosphorescence of the waves or slapping ourselves here and there whenever we heard the buzz of a mosquito,--that scourge of our resting hours.

"The doctor, a hardy and genial old fellow, would come and sit down under the bower before my door, and we'd spend the night together, with a jar or a watermelon at our side, speaking of his patients, folks of land or sea, credulous, rough and insolent in their manners, given over to fishing or to the cultivation of their fields. At times we laughed as he recalled the illness of Visanteta, the daughter of _la Soberana_, an old fishmonger who justified her nickname of _the Queen_ by her bulk and her stature, as well as by the arrogance with which she treated her market companions, imposing her will upon them by right of might.... The belle of the place was this Visanteta: tiny, malicious, with a clever tongue, and no other good looks than that of youthful health; but she had a pair of penetrating eyes and a trick of pretending timidity,

weakness and interest, which simply turned the heads of the village youths. Her sweetheart was _Carafosca_, a brave fisherman who was capable of sailing on a stick of wood. On the sea he was admired by all for his audacity; on land he filled everybody with fear by his provoking silence and the facility with which he whipped out his aggressive sailor's knife. Ugly, burly and always ready for a fight, like the huge creatures that from time to time showed up in the waters of Nazaret devouring all the fish, he would walk to church on Sunday afternoons at his sweetheart's side, and every time the maiden raised her head to speak to him, amidst the simple talk and lispings of a delicate, pampered child, _Carafosca_ would cast a challenging look about him with his squinting eyes, as if defying all the folk of the fields, the beach and the sea to take his Visanteta away from him.

"One day the most astounding news was bruited about Nazaret. The daughter of _la Soberana_ had an animal inside of her. Her abdomen was swelling; the slow deformation revealed itself through her underskirts and her dress; her face lost color, and the fact that she had swooned several times, vomiting painfully, upset the entire cabin and caused her mother to burst into desperate lamentations and to run in terror for help. Many of her neighbors smiled when they heard of this illness. Let them tell it to _Carafosca_!... But the incredulous ones ceased their malicious talk and their suspicions when they saw how sad and desperate _Carafosca_ became at his sweetheart's illness, praying for her recovery with all the fervor of a simple soul, even going so far as to enter the little village church,--he, who had always been a pagan, a blasphemer of God and the saints.

"Yes, it was a strange and horrible sickness. The people, in their predisposition to believe in all sorts of extraordinary and rare afflictions, were certain that they knew what this was. Visanteta had a toad in her stomach. She had drunk from a certain spot of the near-by river, and the wicked animal, small and almost unnoticeable, had gone down into her stomach, growing fast. The good neighbors, trembling with stupefaction, flocked to _la Soberana's_ cabin to examine the girl. All, with a certain solemnity, felt the swelling abdomen, seeking in its tightened surface the outlines of the hidden creature. Some of them, older and more experienced than the rest, laughed with a triumphant expression. There it was, right under their hand. They could feel it stirring, moving about.... Yes, it was moving! And after grave deliberation, they agreed upon remedies to expel the unwelcome guest. They gave the girl spoonfuls of rosemary honey, so that the wicked creature inside should start to eat it gluttonously, and when he was most preoccupied in his joyous meal, whiz!--an inundation of onion juice and vinegar that would bring him out at full gallop. At the same time they applied to her stomach miraculous plasters, so that the toad, left without a moment's rest, should escape in terror; there were rags soaked in brandy and saturated with incense; tangles of hemp dipped in the calking of the ships; mountain herbs; simple bits of paper with numbers,

crosses and Solomon's seal upon them, sold by the miracle-worker of the city. Visanteta thought that all these remedies that were being thrust down her throat would be the death of her. She shuddered with the chills of nausea, she writhed in horrible contortions as if she were about to expel her very entrails, but the odious toad did not deign to show even one of his legs, and la Soberana cried to heaven. Ah, her daughter!... Those remedies would never succeed in casting out the wretched animal; it was better to let it alone, and not torture the poor girl; rather give it a great deal to eat, so that it wouldn't feed upon the strength of Visanteta who was glowing paler and weaker every day.

"And as la Soberana was poor, all her friends, moved by the compassionate solidarity of the common people, devoted themselves to the feeding of Visanteta so that the toad should do her no harm. The fisherwomen, upon returning from the square brought her cakes that were purchased in city establishments, that only the upper class patronized; on the beach, when the catch was sorted, they laid aside for her a dainty morsel that would serve for a succulent soup; the neighbors, who happened to be cooking in their pots over the fire would take out a cupful of the best of the broth, carrying it slowly so that it shouldn't spill, and bring it to la Soberana's cabin; cups of chocolate arrived one after the other every afternoon.

"Visanteta rebelled against this excessive kindness. She couldn't swallow another drop! She was full! But her mother stuck out her hairy nose with an imperious expression. 'I tell you to eat!' She must remember what she had inside of her.... And she began to feel a faint, indefinable affection for that mysterious creature, lodged in the entrails of her daughter. She pictured it to herself; she could see it; it was her pride. Thanks to it, the whole town had its eyes upon the cabin and the trail of visitors was unending, and la Soberana never passed a woman on her way without being stopped and asked for news.

"Only once had they summoned the doctor, seeing him pass by the door; but not that they really wished him, or had any faith in him. What could that helpless man do against such a tenacious animal!... And upon hearing that, not content with the explanations of the mother and the daughter and his own audacious tapping around her clothes, he recommended an internal examination, the proud mother almost showed him the door. The impudent wretch! Not in a hurry was he going to have the pleasure of seeing her daughter so intimately! The poor thing, so good and so modest, who blushed merely at the thought of such proposals!...

"On Sunday afternoons Visanteta went to church, figuring at the head of the daughters of Mary. Her voluminous abdomen was eyed with admiration by the girls. They all asked breathlessly after the toad, and Visanteta replied wearily. It didn't bother her so much now. It had grown very much because she ate so well; sometimes it moved about, but it didn't hurt as it used to. One after the other the maidens would place their

hands upon the afflicted one and feel the movements of the invisible creature, admiring as they did so the superiority of their friend. The curate, a blessed chap of pious simplicity, pretended not to notice the feminine curiosity, and thought with awe of the things done by God to put His creatures to the test. Afterwards, when the afternoon drew to a close, and the choir sang in gentle voice the praises of Our Lady of the Sea, each of the virgins would fall to thinking of that mysterious beast, praying fervently that poor Visanteta be delivered of it as soon as possible.

"_Carafosca_, too, enjoyed a certain notoriety because of his sweetheart's affliction. The women accosted him, the old fishermen stopped him to inquire about the animal that was torturing his girl. 'The poor thing! The poor thing!' he would groan, in accents of amorous commiseration. He said no more; but his eyes revealed a vehement desire to take over as soon as possible Visanteta and her toad, since the latter inspired a certain affection in him because of its connection with her.

"One night, when the doctor was at my door, a woman came in search of him, panting with dramatic horror. _La Soberana's_ daughter was very sick; he must run to her rescue. The doctor shrugged his shoulders 'Ah, yes! The toad!' And he didn't seem at all anxious to stir. Then came another woman, more agitated than the first. Poor Visanteta! She was dying! Her shrieks could be heard all over the street. The wicked beast was devouring her entrails....

"I followed the doctor, attracted by the curiosity that had the whole town in a commotion. When we came to _la Soberana's_ cabin we had to force our way through a compact group of women who obstructed the doorway, crowding into the house. A rending shriek, a rasping wail came from the innermost part of the dwelling, rising above the heads of the curious or terrified women. The hoarse voice of _la Soberana_ answered with entreating accents. Her daughter! Ah, Lord, her poor daughter!...

"The arrival of the physician was received by a chorus of demands on the part of the old women. Poor Visanteta was writhing furiously, unable to bear such pain; her eyes bulged from their sockets and her features were distorted. She must be operated upon; her entrails must be opened and the green, slippery demon that was eating her alive must be expelled.

"The doctor proceeded upon his task, without paying any attention to the advice showered upon him, and before I could reach his side his voice resounded through the sudden silence, with ill-humored brusqueness:

"'But good Lord, the only trouble with this girl is that she's going to....!'

"Before he could finish, all could guess from the harshness of his voice

what he was about to say. The group of women yielded before _la Soberana's_ thrusts even as the waves of the sea under the belly of a whale. She stuck out her big hands and her threatening nails, mumbling insults and looking at the doctor with murder in her eyes. Bandit! Drunkard! Out of her house!...It was the people's fault, for supporting such an infidel. She'd eat him up! Let them make way for her!... And she struggled violently with her friends, fighting to free herself and scratch out the doctor's eyes. To her vindictive cries were joined the weak bleating of Visanteta, protesting with the breath that was left her between her groans of pain. It was a lie! Let that wicked man be gone! What a nasty mouth he had! It was all a lie!...

"But the doctor went hither and thither, asking for water, for bandages, snappy and imperious in his commands, paying no attention whatsoever to the threats of the mother or the cries of the daughter, which were becoming louder and more heart-rending than ever. Suddenly she roared as if she were being slaughtered, and there was a bustle of curiosity around the physician, whom I couldn't see. 'It's a lie! A lie! Evil-tongued wretch! Slanderer!'... But the protestations of Visanteta were no longer unaccompanied. To her voice of an innocent victim begging justice from heaven was added the cry of a pair of lungs that were breathing the air for the first time.

"And now the friends of _la Soberana_ had to restrain her from falling upon her daughter. She would kill her! The bitch! Whose child was that?... And terrified by the threats of her mother, the sick woman, who was still sobbing 'It's a lie! A lie!' at last spoke. It was a young fellow of the _huerta_ whom she had never seen again... an indiscretion committed one evening... she no longer remembered. No, she could not remember!... And she insisted upon this forgetfulness as if it were an incontrovertible excuse.

"The people now saw through it all. The women were impatient to spread the news. As we left, _la Soberana_, humiliated and in tears, tried to kneel before the doctor and kiss his hand. 'Ay, Don Antoni!... Don Antoni!' She asked pardon for her insults; she despaired when she thought of the village comments. What they would have to suffer now!... On the following day the youths that sang as they arranged their nets would invent new verses. The song of the toad! Her life would become impossible!... But even more than this, the thought of _Carafosca_ terrified her. She knew very well what sort of brute that was. He would kill poor Visanteta the first time she appeared on the street; and she herself would meet the same fate for being her mother and not having guarded her well. 'Ay, Don Antoni!' She begged him, upon her knees, to see _Carafosca_. He, who was so good and who knew so much, could convince the fellow with his reasoning, and make him swear that he would not do the women any harm,--that he would forget them.

"The doctor received these entreaties with the same indifference as he

had received the threats, and he answered sharply. He would see about it; it was a delicate affair. But once in the street, he shrugged his shoulders with resignation. 'Let's go and see that animal.'

"We pulled him out of the tavern and the three of us began to walk along the beach through the darkness. The fisherman seemed to be awed at finding himself between two persons of such importance. Don Antonio spoke to him of the indisputable superiority of men ever since the earliest days of creation; of the scorn with which women should be regarded because of their lack of seriousness; of their immense number and the ease with which we could pick another if the one we had happened to displease us... and at last, with brutal directness, told what had happened.

"_Carafosca_ hesitated, as if he had not understood the doctor's words very well. Little by little the certainty dawned upon his dense comprehension. 'By God! By God!' And he scratched himself fearfully under his cap, and brought his hands to his sash as if he were seeking his redoubtable knife.

"The physician tried to console him. He must forget Visanteta; there would be no sense or advantage in killing her. It wasn't worth while for a splendid chap like him to go to prison for slaying a worthless creature like her. The real culprit was that unknown laborer; but... and she! And how easily she... committed the indiscretion, not being able to recall anything afterwards!...

"For a long time we walked along in painful silence, with no other novelty than _Carafosca's_ scratching of his head and his sash. Suddenly he surprised us with the roar of his voice, speaking to us in Castilian, thus adding solemnity to what he said:

"'Do you want me to tell you something?... Do you want me to tell you something?'

"He looked at us with hostile eyes, as if he saw before him the unknown culprit of the _huerta_, ready to pounce upon him. It could be seen that his sluggish brain had just adopted a very firm resolution.... What was it? Let him speak.

"'Well, then,' he articulated slowly, as if we were enemies whom he desired to confound, 'I tell you... that now I love the girl more than ever.'

"In our stupefaction, at a loss for reply, we shook hands with him."

END

MUNGIA

by Gabriele D'Annunzio

Translator: Rafael Mantellini

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Through all the country of Pescara, San Silvestro, Fontanella, San Rocco, even as far as Spoltore, and through all the farms of Vallelonga beyond Allento and particularly in the little boroughs where sailors meet near the mouth of the river,—through all this country, where the houses are built of clay and of reeds, and the fire material is supplied by drift wood from the sea, for many years a Catholic rhapsodist with a barbarian and piratical name, who is as blind as the ancient Homer, has been famous.

Mungia begins his peregrinations at the beginning of spring, and ends them with the first frosts of October. He goes about the country, conducted by a woman and a child. Into the peaceful gardens and the serenity of the fields he brings his lamenting religious songs, antiphonies, preludes and responses of the offices of the dead. His figure is so familiar to all, that even the dogs in the backyards do not bark at his approach. He announces his advent with a trill from his clarionet, and at the well-known signal, the old wives come out upon the thresholds to welcome him, place his chair under the shade of a tree in the yard, and make inquiries as to his health. All the peasants come from their work, and form a subdued and awed circle about him, while with their hard hands they wipe the perspiration of toil from their foreheads, and, still holding their implements, assume a reverent attitude. Their bare arms and legs are knotted and misshapen from the severe toil of the fields; their twisted bodies have taken on the hue of the earth—working in the soil from the dawn of day, they seem to have something in common with the trees and the roots.

A sort of religious solemnity is thrown over everything by this blind man. It is not the sun, it is not the fulness of the earth, not the joy of spring vegetation, not the sounds of the distant choruses that gives to all the feeling of admiration, of devotion, and more than all, the sadness of religion. One of the old women gives the name of a departed relative to whom she wishes to offer songs and oblations. Mungia uncovers his head.

His wide shining cranium appears encircled with white hair; his whole face, which in its quiet calm has the appearance of a mask, wrinkles up when he takes the clarionet in his mouth. Upon his temples, under his eyes, beside his ears, around his nostrils and at the corners of his mouth, a thousand lines become visible, some delicate, some

deep, changing with the rhythm of the music by which he is inspired. His nerves are at a tension, and over his jaw bones the purple veins show, like those of the turning vine-leaves in the autumn, the lower eyelid is turned outward, showing a reddish line, over his whole face the tough skin is tightly drawn, giving the appearance of a wonderful carving in relief; the light plays over the face with its short, stiff, and badly shaved beard, and over the neck, with its deep hollows, between the long still cords which stand out prominently, flashing like dew upon a warty and mouldy pumpkin; and, as he plays, a thousand vibrating minor notes float out upon the air, and the humble head takes on an appearance of mystery. His fingers press the unsteady keys of the box-wood clarionet, and the notes pour out. The instrument itself seems almost human, and to breathe with life, as inanimate objects which have been long and intimately associated with men often do; the wood has an unctuous glare; the holes, which in the winter months become the nests of little spiders, are still filled with cobwebs and dust; the keys are stained with verdigris; in places beeswax has been employed to cover up breaks; the joints are held together with paper and thread, while about the edge one can still see the ornaments of its youth. The blind man's voice rises weak and uncertain, his fingers move mechanically, searching for the notes of a prelude, or an interlude of days long passed.

His long, deformed hands, with knots upon the phalanges of the first three fingers, and with the nails of his thumbs depressed and white in colour, resemble somewhat the hands of a decrepit monkey; the backs are of the unhealthy colour of decayed fruit, a mixture of pink, yellow and blue shades; the palms show a net-work of lines and furrows, and between the fingers the skin is blistered.

When he has finished the prelude, Mungia begins to sing, “_Libera Me Domine_,” and “_Ne Recorderis_,” slowly, and upon a modulation of five notes. The Latin words of the song are interspersed with his native idioms, and now and then, to fill out the metrical rhythm, he inserts an adverb ending in _ente_, which he follows with heavy rhymes; he raises his voice in these parts, then lowers it in the less fatiguing lines. The name of Jesus runs often through the rhapsody; not without a certain dramatic movement. The passion of Jesus is narrated in verses of five lines.

The peasants listen with an air of devotion, watching the blind man's mouth as he sings. In the season, the chorus of the vintagers comes from the fields, vieing with the notes of the pious songs; Mungia, whose hearing is weak, sings on of the mysteries of death; his lips adhere to his toothless gums, and the saliva runs down and drips from his chin; placing the clarionet again to his lips, he begins the intermezzo, then takes up the rhymes again, and so continues to the end. His recompense is a small measure of corn and a bottle of wine or a bunch of onions, and sometimes a hen.

He rises from his chair, a tall, emaciated figure, with bent back and knees turning a little backward. He wears upon his head a large green cap, and no matter what the season, he is wrapped in a peasant cloak falling from his throat below his knees and fastened with two brass buckles. He moves with difficulty, at times stopping to cough.

When October comes, and the vineyards have been vintaged and the yards are filled with mud and gravel, he withdraws into a garret, which he shares with a tailor who has a paralytic wife, and a street pauper with nine children who are variously afflicted with scrofula and the rickets. On pleasant days he is taken to the arch of Portanova, and sits upon a rock in the sun, while he softly sings the “_De Profundis_” to keep his throat in condition. On these occasions, mendicants of all sorts gather around him, men with dislocated limbs, hunchbacks, cripples, paralytics, lepers, women covered with wounds and scabs, toothless women, and those without eyebrows and without hair; children, green as locusts, emaciated, with sharp, savage eyes, like birds of prey; taciturn, with mouths already withered; children who bear in their blood diseases inherited from the monster Poverty; all of that miserable, degenerate rabble, the remnants of a decrepit race. These ragged children of God come to gather about the singer, and speak to him as one of themselves.

Then Mungia graciously begins to sing to the waiting crowd. Chiachiu, a native of Silvi, approaches, dragging himself with great difficulty, helping himself with the palms of his hands, on which he wears a covering of leather; when he reaches the group about Mungia, he stops, holding in his hands his right foot, which is twisted and contorted like a root. Strigia, an uncertain, repugnant figure, a senile hermaphrodite with bright red carbuncles covering neck and grey locks on the temples, of which the creature seems to be proud, the top and back of the head covered with wool like a vulture, next approaches. Then come the Mammalucchi, three idiot brothers, who seem to have been brought forth from the union of man and goat, so manifest in their faces are the ovine features. The oldest of the three has some soft, degenerated bulbs protruding from the orbs of his eyes, of a bluish colour, much like oval bags of pulp about to rot. The peculiar affliction of the youngest is in his ear, the lobe of which is abnormally inflated, and of the violet hue of a fig. The three come together, with bags of strings upon their backs.

The Ossei comes also, a lean, serpent-like man with an olive-coloured face, a flat nose with a singular aspect of malice and deceit, which betrays his gipsy origin, and eyelids which turn up like those of a pilot who sails over stormy seas. Following him is Catalana di Gissi, a woman of uncertain age, her skin covered with long reddish blisters, and on her forehead spots looking like copper coins, hipless, like a bitch after confinement: she is called the Venus of

the Mendicants,—the fountain of Love at which all the thirsty ones are quenched.

Then comes Jacobbe of Campli, an old man with greenish-coloured hair like some of the mechanics' work in brass; then industrious Gargala in a vehicle built of the remains of broken boats, still smeared with tar; then Constantino di Corropoli, the cynic, whose lower lip has a growth which gives him the appearance of holding a piece of raw meat between his teeth. And still they come, inhabitants of the woods who have moved along the course of the river from the hills to the sea; all gather around the rhapsodist in the sun.

Mungia then sings with studied gestures and strange postures. His soul is filled with exaltation, an aureole of glory surrounds him, for now he gives himself freely to his Muse, unrestrained in his singing. He scarcely hears the clamour of applause which arises from the swarming mendicants as he closes.

At the end of the song, as the warm sun has left the spot where the group is assembled and is climbing the Corinthian columns of the arch of the Capitol, the mendicants bid the blind man farewell and disperse through the neighbouring lands. Usually Chiachiu di Silvi, holding his deformed foot, and the dwarfed brothers remain after the others have gone, asking alms of passers-by, while Mungia sits silent, thinking, perhaps, of the triumphs of his youth when Lucicoppelle, Golpo di Casoli, and Quattorece were alive.

Oh, the glorious band of Mungia! The small orchestra had won through all the lower valley of Pescara a lofty fame. Golpo di Casoli played the viola. He was a greyish little man, like the lizards on the rocks, with the skin of his face and neck wrinkled and membranous like that of a turtle boiled in water. He wore a sort of Phrygian cap which covered his ears on the sides. He played on his viola with quick gestures, pressing the instrument with his sharp chin and with his contracted fingers hammering the keys in an ostentatious effort, as do the monkeys of wandering mountebanks.

After him came Quattorece with his bass viol slung over his stomach by a strap of ass-leather; he was as tall and thin as a wax candle, and throughout his person was a predominance of orange tints; he looked like one of those monochromatic painted figures in stiff attitudes which ornament some of the poetry of Castelli; his eyes shone with the yellow transparency of a shepherd dog's, the cartilage of his great ears opened like those of a bat against which an orange light is thrown, his clothes were of some tobacco-coloured cloth, such as hunters usually wear; while his old viol, ornamented with feathers, with silver adornments, bows, images, and medals, looked like some barbarian instrument from which one might expect strange sounds to issue. But Lucicoppelle, holding across his chest his rough,

two-stringed guitar, well tuned in diapason, came in last, with the bold, dancing step of a rustic Figaro. He was the joyful spirit of the orchestra, the greenest one in age and strength, the liveliest and the brightest. A heavy tuft of crisp hair fell over his forehead under a scarlet cap, and in his ears shone womanlike, two silver clasps. He loved wine as a musical toast. To serenades in honour of beauty, to open-air dances, to gorgeous, boisterous feasts, to weddings, to christenings, to votive feasts and funeral rites, the band of Mungia would hasten, expected and acclaimed. The nuptial procession would move through the streets strewn with bulrush blossoms and sweet-scented herbs, greeted with joyful shouts and salutes. Five mules, decorated with wreaths, carried the wedding presents. In a cart drawn by two oxen whose harness was wound with ribbons, and whose backs were covered with draperies, were seated the bridal couple; from the cart dangled boilers, earthen vessels, and copper pots, which shook and rattled with the jolting of the vehicle; chairs, tables, sofas, all sorts of antique shapes of household furniture oscillated, creaking, about them; damask skirts, richly figured with flowers, embroidered waist-coats, silken aprons, and all sorts of articles of women's apparel shone in the sun in bright array, while a distaff, the symbol of domestic virtue, piled on top with the linen, was outlined against the blue sky like a golden staff.

The women relatives, carrying upon their heads baskets of grain, upon the top of which was a loaf, and upon the loaf a flower, came next in hierarchical order, singing as they walked. This train of simple, graceful figures reminded one of the canephoræ in the Greek bas-reliefs. Reaching the house, the women took the baskets from their heads, and threw a handful of wheat at the bride, pronouncing a ritual augury, invoking fecundity and abundance. The mother, also, observed the ceremony of throwing grain, weeping copiously as with a brush she touched her daughter on the chest, shoulders and forehead, and speaking doleful words of love as she did so.

Then in the courtyard, under a roof of branches, the feast began. Mungia, who had not yet lost his eyesight nor felt the burden of years upon him, erect in all the magnificence of a green coat, perspiring and beaming, blew with all the power of his lungs upon his clarionet, beating time with his foot. Golpo di Casoli struck his violin energetically, Quattorece exerted himself in a wild endeavour to keep up with the crescendo of the Moorish dance, while Lucicoppelle, standing straight with his head up, holding aloft in his left hand the key of his guitar, and with the right pricking on two strings the metric chords, looked down at the women, laughing gaily among the flowers.

Then the "Master of Ceremonies" brought in the viands on large painted plates and the cloud of vapour rising from the hot dishes faded away among the foliage of the trees. The amphoras of wine, with

their well-worn handles, were passed around from one to another, the men stretched their arms out across the table between the loaves of bread, scattered with anise seeds, and the cheese cakes, round as full moons, and helped themselves to olives, oranges and almonds. The smell of spice mingled with the fresh, vaporous odour of the vegetables; sometimes the guests offered the bride goblets of wine in which were small pieces of jewelry, or necklaces of great grape stones like a string of golden fruit. After a while the exhilarating effects of the liquor began to be felt, and the crowd grew hilarious with Bacchic joy and then Mungia, advancing with uncovered head and holding in his hands a glass filled to the rim, would sing the beautiful deistic ritual which to feasters throughout the land of Abruzzi gave a disposition for friendly toasts:

“To the health of all these friends of mine, united, I drink this wine so pure and fine.”

PEACEFUL-LIGHT

by Unknown

Translator: George Soulié

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In the time when the Shining Dynasty had just conquered the throne, the eastern coasts of the Empire were ravaged by the rapid junks commanded by the cruel inhabitants of the Japanese islands, the irresistible _Wo tsz_.

Now, it happened that the _Wo tsz_ Emperor lost his first wife; knowing the beauty of Chinese women, he charged one of his officers to bring back some of them.

The officer, at the head of a numerous troop, landed not far from the town of The-Smoky-wall. No resistance was possible; the population was given the example of flight by the functionaries, at least it was thus said in the Annals of the prefecture.

The country being far from the big centres, the women were not great coquettes; only one, named Peaceful-light, had always been careful, since childhood, not to allow her feet to become naturally large; they were constantly bound up, so much so that she could hardly walk.

Her large soft eyes were shaded with heavy eyelashes; one of the literati of the place took delight in quoting the poets of antiquity on

them:

Under the willow of her eyelashes
The tranquil river of her eyes shines forth.
I bend and see my image reflected in them.
Could she be deceitful like the deep water?

When the pirates were coming, she begged her family to leave her, and to fly without the risk of being delayed by her.

"It is the just punishment for my coquetry," she told them. "Fear nothing for me, however. I am going to take a strong dose of the paste extracted from the flowers of Nao-yang which makes one sleep. The pirates will think I am dead, and will leave me."

The family allowed themselves to be persuaded, and departed. As to Peaceful-light, she was asleep almost directly after taking the drug, and she remained motionless on her bed.

The pirates, entering everywhere, at last arrived in the house and remained struck with admiration by her beauty. The officer who was called, at first thought her dead and was much grieved, but, touching her hand and finding it warm and limp, he resolved to carry her away.

When the ravishers were re-embarked, the strong sea-air and the motion of the boat revived the young girl; she awoke, and was horrified to find herself surrounded by strangers. The one who seemed the chief spoke to her in Chinese language in order to reassure her:

"Fear nothing. No harm will come to you. On the contrary, the highest destiny awaits you; my Lord The Emperor designs you to the honour of his couch."

Seeing that no one troubled her, Peaceful-light was reassured; she resolved to wait, confident in her destiny, and knowing that she had still, ready in her sleeve, in case of necessity, a narcotic dose strong enough to kill her.

As soon as she landed, she was taken in great haste to the Palace. The Emperor, greatly satisfied with her beauty, conferred on her at once the rank of first favourite.

But all the luxury and love which surrounded her could not make her forget her family and her country; she resolved to run away.

In order to manage it, she complained to her master how sad it was for her never to be able to speak her own language with companions from her country. The Emperor, happy to be able to please her, gave orders to fit out a sea-junk, in order to go to the Chinese coast.

The day when all was ready the young girl found means of pouring into her master's drink a dose of her narcotic. Then, when he was asleep, she took his private seal and, going out of the room, she called the intendant of the Palace and said to him:

"The Emperor has ordered me to go to China to fetch a magician, a member of my family, who has great power on water and wind. Here is the seal, proof of my mission. The ship must be almost ready."

The intendant knew that a junk had been specially prepared to go to China; he saw the seal; what suspicion could he have? He had a palanquin brought as quickly as possible; two hours after, the wood of the junk groaned under the blows of the unfurling waves.

Arriving in sight of the coast, on the pretext of not frightening the population, the young girl begged the officer who accompanied her to send a messenger to the prefect of the town, bearing a letter that she had prepared. The officer, without distrust, sent one of his men.

The letter of Peaceful-light showed a whole scheme to which the prefect could but give his consent. The messenger returned, bringing to the officer and to the men an invitation to take part in the feast that was being prepared for them, their intentions not being bad.

Peaceful-light retired into her family, who welcomed her with a thousand demonstrations of joy.

In the wine that was freely poured out for the strangers they had dissolved the flowers of Nao-yang. The effects were not long in being felt; a torpor that they attributed to the table excesses seized them one after another. They were soon all sleeping deeply. Men arrived with swords, glided near them, and, a signal being given, cut off their heads.

While these events were passing in China, others still more serious were happening in Japan. Soon after the departure of Peaceful-light, the Emperor's brother penetrated into the room where the sovereign was left sleeping. This brother was ambitious; he profited by the occasion, killed the unhappy Mikado, took possession of the seals of the State, and, calling his partisans in haste, proclaimed himself Chief of the State. Only a part of the princes followed him; the others, filled with indignation by the crime that had been accomplished, united their troops to crush the usurper; civil war tore the whole of Japan to pieces.

As to Peaceful-light, by order of the authorities she received public congratulations and gifts of land which allowed her to marry and be happy, as she merited.

THE KING-HERMIT

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Forerunner*, by Kahlil Gibran

They told me that in a forest among the mountains lives a young man in solitude who once was a king of a vast country beyond the Two Rivers. And they also said that he, of his own will, had left his throne and the land of his glory and come to dwell in the wilderness.

And I said, "I would seek that man, and learn the secret of his heart; for he who renounces a kingdom must needs be greater than a kingdom."

On that very day I went to the forest where he dwells. And I found him sitting under a white cypress, and in his hand a reed as if it were a sceptre. And I greeted him even as I would greet a king.

And he turned to me and said gently, "What would you in this forest of serenity? Seek you a lost self in the green shadows, or is it a home-coming in your twilight?"

And I answered, "I sought but you--for I fain would know that which made you leave a kingdom for a forest."

And he said, "Brief is my story, for sudden was the bursting of the bubble. It happened thus: One day as I sat at a window in my palace, my chamberlain and an envoy from a foreign land were walking in my garden. And as they approached my window, the lord chamberlain was speaking of himself and saying, 'I am like the king; I have a thirst for strong wine and a hunger for all games of chance. And like my lord the king I have storms of temper.' And the lord chamberlain and the envoy disappeared among the trees. But in a few minutes they returned, and this time the lord chamberlain was speaking of me, and he was saying, 'My lord the king is like myself--a good marksman; and like me he loves music and bathes thrice a day.'"

After a moment he added, "On the eve of that day I left my palace with but my garment, for I would no longer be ruler over those who assume my vices and attribute to me their virtues."

And I said, "This is indeed a wonder, and passing strange."

And he said, "Nay, my friend, you knocked at the gate of my silences and received but a trifle. For who would not leave a kingdom for a forest where the seasons sing and dance ceaselessly? Many are those who have given their kingdom for less than solitude and the sweet fellowship of

aloneness. Countless are the eagles who descend from the upper air to live with moles that they may know the secrets of the earth. There are those who renounce the kingdom of dreams that they may not seem distant from the dreamless. And those who renounce the kingdom of nakedness and cover their souls that others may not be ashamed in beholding truth uncovered and beauty unveiled. And greater yet than all of these is he who renounces the kingdom of sorrow that he may not seem proud and vainglorious.”

Then rising he leaned upon his reed and said, “Go now to the great city and sit at its gate and watch all those who enter into it and those who go out. And see that you find him who, though born a king, is without kingdom; and him who though ruled in flesh rules in spirit--though neither he nor his subjects know this; and him also who but seems to rule yet is in truth slave of his own slaves.”

After he had said these things he smiled on me, and there were a thousand dawns upon his lips. Then he turned and walked away into the heart of the forest.

And I returned to the city, and I sat at its gate to watch the passersby even as he had told me. And from that day to this numberless are the kings whose shadows have passed over me and few are the subjects over whom my shadow has passed.

IONITCH

Project Gutenberg's *The Lady With The Dog and Other Stories*, by Anton Chekhov
Translated by Constance Garnett

I

WHEN visitors to the provincial town S---- complained of the dreariness and monotony of life, the inhabitants of the town, as though defending themselves, declared that it was very nice in S----, that there was a library, a theatre, a club; that they had balls; and, finally, that there were clever, agreeable, and interesting families with whom one could make acquaintance. And they used to point to the family of the Turkins as the most highly cultivated and talented.

This family lived in their own house in the principal street, near the Governor's. Ivan Petrovitch Turkin himself--a stout, handsome, dark man with whiskers--used to get up amateur performances for benevolent objects, and used to take the part of an elderly general and cough very

amusingly. He knew a number of anecdotes, charades, proverbs, and was fond of being humorous and witty, and he always wore an expression from which it was impossible to tell whether he were joking or in earnest. His wife, Vera Iosifovna--a thin, nice-looking lady who wore a pince-nez--used to write novels and stories, and was very fond of reading them aloud to her visitors. The daughter, Ekaterina Ivanovna, a young girl, used to play on the piano. In short, every member of the family had a special talent. The Turkins welcomed visitors, and good-humouredly displayed their talents with genuine simplicity. Their stone house was roomy and cool in summer; half of the windows looked into a shady old garden, where nightingales used to sing in the spring. When there were visitors in the house, there was a clatter of knives in the kitchen and a smell of fried onions in the yard--and that was always a sure sign of a plentiful and savoury supper to follow.

And as soon as Dmitri Ionitch Startsev was appointed the district doctor, and took up his abode at Dyalizh, six miles from S---, he, too, was told that as a cultivated man it was essential for him to make the acquaintance of the Turkins. In the winter he was introduced to Ivan Petrovitch in the street; they talked about the weather, about the theatre, about the cholera; an invitation followed. On a holiday in the spring--it was Ascension Day--after seeing his patients, Startsev set off for town in search of a little recreation and to make some purchases. He walked in a leisurely way (he had not yet set up his carriage), humming all the time:

"Before I'd drunk the tears from life's goblet...."

In town he dined, went for a walk in the gardens, then Ivan Petrovitch's invitation came into his mind, as it were of itself, and he decided to call on the Turkins and see what sort of people they were.

"How do you do, if you please?" said Ivan Petrovitch, meeting him on the steps. "Delighted, delighted to see such an agreeable visitor. Come along; I will introduce you to my better half. I tell him, Verotchka," he went on, as he presented the doctor to his wife--"I tell him that he has no human right to sit at home in a hospital; he ought to devote his leisure to society. Oughtn't he, darling?"

"Sit here," said Vera Iosifovna, making her visitor sit down beside her. "You can dance attendance on me. My husband is jealous--he is an Othello; but we will try and behave so well that he will notice nothing."

"Ah, you spoilt chicken!" Ivan Petrovitch muttered tenderly, and he kissed her on the forehead. "You have come just in the nick of time," he said, addressing the doctor again. "My better half has written a 'hugeous' novel, and she is going to read it aloud to-day."

"Petit Jean," said Vera Iosifovna to her husband, "dites que l'on nous donne du thé."

Startsev was introduced to Ekaterina Ivanovna, a girl of eighteen, very much like her mother, thin and pretty. Her expression was still childish and her figure was soft and slim; and her developed girlish bosom, healthy and beautiful, was suggestive of spring, real spring.

Then they drank tea with jam, honey, and sweetmeats, and with very nice cakes, which melted in the mouth. As the evening came on, other visitors gradually arrived, and Ivan Petrovitch fixed his laughing eyes on each of them and said:

"How do you do, if you please?"

Then they all sat down in the drawing-room with very serious faces, and Vera Iosifovna read her novel. It began like this: "The frost was intense...." The windows were wide open; from the kitchen came the clatter of knives and the smell of fried onions.... It was comfortable in the soft deep arm-chair; the lights had such a friendly twinkle in the twilight of the drawing-room, and at the moment on a summer evening when sounds of voices and laughter floated in from the street and whiffs of lilac from the yard, it was difficult to grasp that the frost was intense, and that the setting sun was lighting with its chilly rays a solitary wayfarer on the snowy plain. Vera Iosifovna read how a beautiful young countess founded a school, a hospital, a library, in her village, and fell in love with a wandering artist; she read of what never happens in real life, and yet it was pleasant to listen--it was comfortable, and such agreeable, serene thoughts kept coming into the mind, one had no desire to get up.

"Not badsome ..." Ivan Petrovitch said softly.

And one of the visitors hearing, with his thoughts far away, said hardly audibly:

"Yes ... truly...."

One hour passed, another. In the town gardens close by a band was playing and a chorus was singing. When Vera Iosifovna shut her manuscript book, the company was silent for five minutes, listening to "Lutchina" being sung by the chorus, and the song gave what was not in the novel and is in real life.

"Do you publish your stories in magazines?" Startsev asked Vera Iosifovna.

"No," she answered. "I never publish. I write it and put it away in my cupboard. Why publish?" she explained. "We have enough to live on."

And for some reason every one sighed.

"And now, Kitten, you play something," Ivan Petrovitch said to his daughter.

The lid of the piano was raised and the music lying ready was opened. Ekaterina Ivanovna sat down and banged on the piano with both hands, and then banged again with all her might, and then again and again; her shoulders and bosom shook. She obstinately banged on the same notes, and it sounded as if she would not leave off until she had hammered the keys into the piano. The drawing-room was filled with the din; everything was resounding; the floor, the ceiling, the furniture.... Ekaterina Ivanovna was playing a difficult passage, interesting simply on account of its difficulty, long and monotonous, and Startsev, listening, pictured stones dropping down a steep hill and going on dropping, and he wished they would leave off dropping; and at the same time Ekaterina Ivanovna, rosy from the violent exercise, strong and vigorous, with a lock of hair falling over her forehead, attracted him very much. After the winter spent at Dyalizh among patients and peasants, to sit in a drawing-room, to watch this young, elegant, and, in all probability, pure creature, and to listen to these noisy, tedious but still cultured sounds, was so pleasant, so novel....

"Well, Kitten, you have played as never before," said Ivan Petrovitch, with tears in his eyes, when his daughter had finished and stood up. "Die, Denis; you won't write anything better."

All flocked round her, congratulated her, expressed astonishment, declared that it was long since they had heard such music, and she listened in silence with a faint smile, and her whole figure was expressive of triumph.

"Splendid, superb!"

"Splendid," said Startsev, too, carried away by the general enthusiasm. "Where have you studied?" he asked Ekaterina Ivanovna. "At the Conservatoire?"

"No, I am only preparing for the Conservatoire, and till now have been working with Madame Zavlovsky."

"Have you finished at the high school here?"

"Oh, no," Vera Iosifovna answered for her, "We have teachers for

her at home; there might be bad influences at the high school or a boarding school, you know. While a young girl is growing up, she ought to be under no influence but her mother's."

"All the same, I'm going to the Conservatoire," said Ekaterina Ivanovna.

"No. Kitten loves her mamma. Kitten won't grieve papa and mamma."

"No, I'm going, I'm going," said Ekaterina Ivanovna, with playful caprice and stamping her foot.

And at supper it was Ivan Petrovitch who displayed his talents. Laughing only with his eyes, he told anecdotes, made epigrams, asked ridiculous riddles and answered them himself, talking the whole time in his extraordinary language, evolved in the course of prolonged practice in witticism and evidently now become a habit: "Badsome," "Hugeous," "Thank you most dumbly," and so on.

But that was not all. When the guests, replete and satisfied, trooped into the hall, looking for their coats and sticks, there bustled about them the footman Pavlusha, or, as he was called in the family, Pava--a lad of fourteen with shaven head and chubby cheeks.

"Come, Pava, perform!" Ivan Petrovitch said to him.

Pava struck an attitude, flung up his arm, and said in a tragic tone: "Unhappy woman, die!"

And every one roared with laughter.

"It's entertaining," thought Startsev, as he went out into the street.

He went to a restaurant and drank some beer, then set off to walk home to Dyalizh; he walked all the way singing:

"Thy voice to me so languid and caressing...."

On going to bed, he felt not the slightest fatigue after the six miles' walk. On the contrary, he felt as though he could with pleasure have walked another twenty.

"Not badsome," he thought, and laughed as he fell asleep.

II

Startsev kept meaning to go to the Turkins' again, but there was a great

deal of work in the hospital, and he was unable to find free time. In this way more than a year passed in work and solitude. But one day a letter in a light blue envelope was brought him from the town.

Vera Iosifovna had been suffering for some time from migraine, but now since Kitten frightened her every day by saying that she was going away to the Conservatoire, the attacks began to be more frequent. All the doctors of the town had been at the Turkins'; at last it was the district doctor's turn. Vera Iosifovna wrote him a touching letter in which she begged him to come and relieve her sufferings. Startsev went, and after that he began to be often, very often at the Turkins'.... He really did something for Vera Iosifovna, and she was already telling all her visitors that he was a wonderful and exceptional doctor. But it was not for the sake of her migraine that he visited the Turkins' now....

It was a holiday. Ekaterina Ivanovna finished her long, wearisome exercises on the piano. Then they sat a long time in the dining-room, drinking tea, and Ivan Petrovitch told some amusing story. Then there was a ring and he had to go into the hall to welcome a guest; Startsev took advantage of the momentary commotion, and whispered to Ekaterina Ivanovna in great agitation:

"For God's sake, I entreat you, don't torment me; let us go into the garden!"

She shrugged her shoulders, as though perplexed and not knowing what he wanted of her, but she got up and went.

"You play the piano for three or four hours," he said, following her; "then you sit with your mother, and there is no possibility of speaking to you. Give me a quarter of an hour at least, I beseech you."

Autumn was approaching, and it was quiet and melancholy in the old garden; the dark leaves lay thick in the walks. It was already beginning to get dark early.

"I haven't seen you for a whole week," Startsev went on, "and if you only knew what suffering it is! Let us sit down. Listen to me."

They had a favourite place in the garden; a seat under an old spreading maple. And now they sat down on this seat.

"What do you want?" said Ekaterina Ivanovna drily, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I have not seen you for a whole week; I have not heard you for so long. I long passionately, I thirst for your voice. Speak."

She fascinated him by her freshness, the naïve expression of her eyes

and cheeks. Even in the way her dress hung on her, he saw something extraordinarily charming, touching in its simplicity and naïve grace; and at the same time, in spite of this naïveté, she seemed to him intelligent and developed beyond her years. He could talk with her about literature, about art, about anything he liked; could complain to her of life, of people, though it sometimes happened in the middle of serious conversation she would laugh inappropriately or run away into the house. Like almost all girls of her neighbourhood, she had read a great deal (as a rule, people read very little in S---, and at the lending library they said if it were not for the girls and the young Jews, they might as well shut up the library). This afforded Startsev infinite delight; he used to ask her eagerly every time what she had been reading the last few days, and listened enthralled while she told him.

"What have you been reading this week since I saw you last?" he asked now. "Do please tell me."

"I have been reading Pisemsky."

"What exactly?"

"A Thousand Souls," answered Kitten. "And what a funny name Pisemsky had--Alexey Feofilaktitch!"

"Where are you going?" cried Startsev in horror, as she suddenly got up and walked towards the house. "I must talk to you; I want to explain myself.... Stay with me just five minutes, I supplicate you!"

She stopped as though she wanted to say something, then awkwardly thrust a note into his hand, ran home and sat down to the piano again.

"Be in the cemetery," Startsev read, "at eleven o'clock to-night, near the tomb of Demetti."

"Well, that's not at all clever," he thought, coming to himself. "Why the cemetery? What for?"

It was clear: Kitten was playing a prank. Who would seriously dream of making an appointment at night in the cemetery far out of the town, when it might have been arranged in the street or in the town gardens? And was it in keeping with him--a district doctor, an intelligent, staid man--to be sighing, receiving notes, to hang about cemeteries, to do silly things that even schoolboys think ridiculous nowadays? What would this romance lead to? What would his colleagues say when they heard of it? Such were Startsev's reflections as he wandered round the tables at the club, and at half-past ten he suddenly set off for the cemetery.

By now he had his own pair of horses, and a coachman called Panteleimon, in a velvet waistcoat. The moon was shining. It was still warm, warm as

it is in autumn. Dogs were howling in the suburb near the slaughter-house. Startsev left his horses in one of the side-streets at the end of the town, and walked on foot to the cemetery.

"We all have our oddities," he thought. "Kitten is odd, too; and--who knows?--perhaps she is not joking, perhaps she will come"; and he abandoned himself to this faint, vain hope, and it intoxicated him.

He walked for half a mile through the fields; the cemetery showed as a dark streak in the distance, like a forest or a big garden. The wall of white stone came into sight, the gate.... In the moonlight he could read on the gate: "The hour cometh." Startsev went in at the little gate, and before anything else he saw the white crosses and monuments on both sides of the broad avenue, and the black shadows of them and the poplars; and for a long way round it was all white and black, and the slumbering trees bowed their branches over the white stones. It seemed as though it were lighter here than in the fields; the maple-leaves stood out sharply like paws on the yellow sand of the avenue and on the stones, and the inscriptions on the tombs could be clearly read. For the first moments Startsev was struck now by what he saw for the first time in his life, and what he would probably never see again; a world not like anything else, a world in which the moonlight was as soft and beautiful, as though slumbering here in its cradle, where there was no life, none whatever; but in every dark poplar, in every tomb, there was felt the presence of a mystery that promised a life peaceful, beautiful, eternal. The stones and faded flowers, together with the autumn scent of the leaves, all told of forgiveness, melancholy, and peace.

All was silence around; the stars looked down from the sky in the profound stillness, and Startsev's footsteps sounded loud and out of place, and only when the church clock began striking and he imagined himself dead, buried there for ever, he felt as though some one were looking at him, and for a moment he thought that it was not peace and tranquillity, but stifled despair, the dumb dreariness of non-existence....

Demetti's tomb was in the form of a shrine with an angel at the top. The Italian opera had once visited S---- and one of the singers had died; she had been buried here, and this monument put up to her. No one in the town remembered her, but the lamp at the entrance reflected the moonlight, and looked as though it were burning.

There was no one, and, indeed, who would come here at midnight? But Startsev waited, and as though the moonlight warmed his passion, he waited passionately, and, in imagination, pictured kisses and embraces. He sat near the monument for half an hour, then paced up and down the side avenues, with his hat in his hand, waiting and thinking of the many women and girls buried in these tombs who had been beautiful and fascinating, who had loved, at night burned with passion, yielding

themselves to caresses. How wickedly Mother Nature jested at man's expense, after all! How humiliating it was to recognise it!

Startsev thought this, and at the same time he wanted to cry out that he wanted love, that he was eager for it at all costs. To his eyes they were not slabs of marble, but fair white bodies in the moonlight; he saw shapes hiding bashfully in the shadows of the trees, felt their warmth, and the languor was oppressive....

And as though a curtain were lowered, the moon went behind a cloud, and suddenly all was darkness. Startsev could scarcely find the gate--by now it was as dark as it is on an autumn night. Then he wandered about for an hour and a half, looking for the side-street in which he had left his horses.

"I am tired; I can scarcely stand on my legs," he said to Panteleimon.

And settling himself with relief in his carriage, he thought: "Och! I ought not to get fat!"

III

The following evening he went to the Turkins' to make an offer. But it turned out to be an inconvenient moment, as Ekaterina Ivanovna was in her own room having her hair done by a hair-dresser. She was getting ready to go to a dance at the club.

He had to sit a long time again in the dining-room drinking tea. Ivan Petrovitch, seeing that his visitor was bored and preoccupied, drew some notes out of his waistcoat pocket, read a funny letter from a German steward, saying that all the ironmongery was ruined and the plasticity was peeling off the walls.

"I expect they will give a decent dowry," thought Startsev, listening absent-mindedly.

After a sleepless night, he found himself in a state of stupefaction, as though he had been given something sweet and soporific to drink; there was fog in his soul, but joy and warmth, and at the same time a sort of cold, heavy fragment of his brain was reflecting:

"Stop before it is too late! Is she the match for you? She is spoilt, whimsical, sleeps till two o'clock in the afternoon, while you are a deacon's son, a district doctor...."

"What of it?" he thought. "I don't care."

"Besides, if you marry her," the fragment went on, "then her relations

will make you give up the district work and live in the town."

"After all," he thought, "if it must be the town, the town it must be. They will give a dowry; we can establish ourselves suitably."

At last Ekaterina Ivanovna came in, dressed for the ball, with a low neck, looking fresh and pretty; and Startsev admired her so much, and went into such ecstasies, that he could say nothing, but simply stared at her and laughed.

She began saying good-bye, and he--he had no reason for staying now--got up, saying that it was time for him to go home; his patients were waiting for him.

"Well, there's no help for that," said Ivan Petrovitch. "Go, and you might take Kitten to the club on the way."

It was spotting with rain; it was very dark, and they could only tell where the horses were by Panteleimon's husky cough. The hood of the carriage was put up.

"I stand upright; you lie down right; he lies all right," said Ivan Petrovitch as he put his daughter into the carriage.

They drove off.

"I was at the cemetery yesterday," Startsev began. "How ungenerous and merciless it was on your part!..."

"You went to the cemetery?"

"Yes, I went there and waited almost till two o'clock. I suffered...."

"Well, suffer, if you cannot understand a joke."

Ekaterina Ivanovna, pleased at having so cleverly taken in a man who was in love with her, and at being the object of such intense love, burst out laughing and suddenly uttered a shriek of terror, for, at that very minute, the horses turned sharply in at the gate of the club, and the carriage almost tilted over. Startsev put his arm round Ekaterina Ivanovna's waist; in her fright she nestled up to him, and he could not restrain himself, and passionately kissed her on the lips and on the chin, and hugged her more tightly.

"That's enough," she said drily.

And a minute later she was not in the carriage, and a policeman near the lighted entrance of the club shouted in a detestable voice to Panteleimon:

"What are you stopping for, you crow? Drive on."

Startsev drove home, but soon afterwards returned. Attired in another man's dress suit and a stiff white tie which kept sawing at his neck and trying to slip away from the collar, he was sitting at midnight in the club drawing-room, and was saying with enthusiasm to Ekaterina Ivanovna.

"Ah, how little people know who have never loved! It seems to me that no one has ever yet written of love truly, and I doubt whether this tender, joyful, agonising feeling can be described, and any one who has once experienced it would not attempt to put it into words. What is the use of preliminaries and introductions? What is the use of unnecessary fine words? My love is immeasurable. I beg, I beseech you," Startsev brought out at last, "be my wife!"

"Dmitri Ionitch," said Ekaterina Ivanovna, with a very grave face, after a moment's thought--"Dmitri Ionitch, I am very grateful to you for the honour. I respect you, but ..." she got up and continued standing, "but, forgive me, I cannot be your wife. Let us talk seriously. Dmitri Ionitch, you know I love art beyond everything in life. I adore music; I love it frantically; I have dedicated my whole life to it. I want to be an artist; I want fame, success, freedom, and you want me to go on living in this town, to go on living this empty, useless life, which has become insufferable to me. To become a wife--oh, no, forgive me! One must strive towards a lofty, glorious goal, and married life would put me in bondage for ever. Dmitri Ionitch" (she faintly smiled as she pronounced his name; she thought of "Alexey Feofilaktitch")--"Dmitri Ionitch, you are a good, clever, honourable man; you are better than any one...." Tears came into her eyes. "I feel for you with my whole heart, but ... but you will understand...."

And she turned away and went out of the drawing-room to prevent herself from crying.

Startsev's heart left off throbbing uneasily. Going out of the club into the street, he first of all tore off the stiff tie and drew a deep breath. He was a little ashamed and his vanity was wounded--he had not expected a refusal--and could not believe that all his dreams, his hopes and yearnings, had led him up to such a stupid end, just as in some little play at an amateur performance, and he was sorry for his feeling, for that love of his, so sorry that he felt as though he could have burst into sobs or have violently belaboured Panteleimon's broad back with his umbrella.

For three days he could not get on with anything, he could not eat nor sleep; but when the news reached him that Ekaterina Ivanovna had gone away to Moscow to enter the Conservatoire, he grew calmer and lived as before.

Afterwards, remembering sometimes how he had wandered about the cemetery or how he had driven all over the town to get a dress suit, he stretched lazily and said:

"What a lot of trouble, though!"

IV

Four years had passed. Startsev already had a large practice in the town. Every morning he hurriedly saw his patients at Dyalizh, then he drove in to see his town patients. By now he drove, not with a pair, but with a team of three with bells on them, and he returned home late at night. He had grown broader and stouter, and was not very fond of walking, as he was somewhat asthmatic. And Panteleimon had grown stout, too, and the broader he grew, the more mournfully he sighed and complained of his hard luck: he was sick of driving! Startsev used to visit various households and met many people, but did not become intimate with any one. The inhabitants irritated him by their conversation, their views of life, and even their appearance. Experience taught him by degrees that while he played cards or lunched with one of these people, the man was a peaceable, friendly, and even intelligent human being; that as soon as one talked of anything not eatable, for instance, of politics or science, he would be completely at a loss, or would expound a philosophy so stupid and ill-natured that there was nothing else to do but wave one's hand in despair and go away. Even when Startsev tried to talk to liberal citizens, saying, for instance, that humanity, thank God, was progressing, and that one day it would be possible to dispense with passports and capital punishment, the liberal citizen would look at him askance and ask him mistrustfully: "Then any one could murder any one he chose in the open street?" And when, at tea or supper, Startsev observed in company that one should work, and that one ought not to live without working, every one took this as a reproach, and began to get angry and argue aggressively. With all that, the inhabitants did nothing, absolutely nothing, and took no interest in anything, and it was quite impossible to think of anything to say. And Startsev avoided conversation, and confined himself to eating and playing _vint_; and when there was a family festivity in some household and he was invited to a meal, then he sat and ate in silence, looking at his plate.

And everything that was said at the time was uninteresting, unjust, and stupid; he felt irritated and disturbed, but held his tongue, and, because he sat glumly silent and looked at his plate, he was nicknamed in the town "the haughty Pole," though he never had been a Pole.

All such entertainments as theatres and concerts he declined, but he played _vint_ every evening for three hours with enjoyment. He had

another diversion to which he took imperceptibly, little by little: in the evening he would take out of his pockets the notes he had gained by his practice, and sometimes there were stuffed in his pockets notes--yellow and green, and smelling of scent and vinegar and incense and fish oil--up to the value of seventy roubles; and when they amounted to some hundreds he took them to the Mutual Credit Bank and deposited the money there to his account.

He was only twice at the Turkins' in the course of the four years after Ekaterina Ivanovna had gone away, on each occasion at the invitation of Vera Iosifovna, who was still undergoing treatment for migraine. Every summer Ekaterina Ivanovna came to stay with her parents, but he did not once see her; it somehow never happened.

But now four years had passed. One still, warm morning a letter was brought to the hospital. Vera Iosifovna wrote to Dmitri Ionitch that she was missing him very much, and begged him to come and see them, and to relieve her sufferings; and, by the way, it was her birthday. Below was a postscript: "I join in mother's request.--K."

Startsev considered, and in the evening he went to the Turkins'.

"How do you do, if you please?" Ivan Petrovitch met him, smiling with his eyes only. "Bongjour."

Vera Iosifovna, white-haired and looking much older, shook Startsev's hand, sighed affectedly, and said:

"You don't care to pay attentions to me, doctor. You never come and see us; I am too old for you. But now some one young has come; perhaps she will be more fortunate."

And Kitten? She had grown thinner, paler, had grown handsomer and more graceful; but now she was Ekaterina Ivanovna, not Kitten; she had lost the freshness and look of childish naïveté. And in her expression and manners there was something new--guilty and diffident, as though she did not feel herself at home here in the Turkins' house.

"How many summers, how many winters!" she said, giving Startsev her hand, and he could see that her heart was beating with excitement; and looking at him intently and curiously, she went on: "How much stouter you are! You look sunburnt and more manly, but on the whole you have changed very little."

Now, too, he thought her attractive, very attractive, but there was something lacking in her, or else something superfluous--he could not himself have said exactly what it was, but something prevented him from feeling as before. He did not like her pallor, her new expression, her faint smile, her voice, and soon afterwards he disliked her clothes,

too, the low chair in which she was sitting; he disliked something in the past when he had almost married her. He thought of his love, of the dreams and the hopes which had troubled him four years before--and he felt awkward.

They had tea with cakes. Then Vera Iosifovna read aloud a novel; she read of things that never happen in real life, and Startsev listened, looked at her handsome grey head, and waited for her to finish.

"People are not stupid because they can't write novels, but because they can't conceal it when they do," he thought.

"Not badsome," said Ivan Petrovitch.

Then Ekaterina Ivanovna played long and noisily on the piano, and when she finished she was profusely thanked and warmly praised.

"It's a good thing I did not marry her," thought Startsev.

She looked at him, and evidently expected him to ask her to go into the garden, but he remained silent.

"Let us have a talk," she said, going up to him. "How are you getting on? What are you doing? How are things? I have been thinking about you all these days," she went on nervously. "I wanted to write to you, wanted to come myself to see you at Dyalizh. I quite made up my mind to go, but afterwards I thought better of it. God knows what your attitude is towards me now; I have been looking forward to seeing you to-day with such emotion. For goodness' sake let us go into the garden."

They went into the garden and sat down on the seat under the old maple, just as they had done four years before. It was dark.

"How are you getting on?" asked Ekaterina Ivanovna.

"Oh, all right; I am jogging along," answered Startsev.

And he could think of nothing more. They were silent.

"I feel so excited!" said Ekaterina Ivanovna, and she hid her face in her hands. "But don't pay attention to it. I am so happy to be at home; I am so glad to see every one. I can't get used to it. So many memories! I thought we should talk without stopping till morning."

Now he saw her face near, her shining eyes, and in the darkness she looked younger than in the room, and even her old childish expression seemed to have come back to her. And indeed she was looking at him with naïve curiosity, as though she wanted to get a closer view and understanding of the man who had loved her so ardently, with such

tenderness, and so unsuccessfully; her eyes thanked him for that love. And he remembered all that had been, every minute detail; how he had wandered about the cemetery, how he had returned home in the morning exhausted, and he suddenly felt sad and regretted the past. A warmth began glowing in his heart.

"Do you remember how I took you to the dance at the club?" he asked. "It was dark and rainy then ..."

The warmth was glowing now in his heart, and he longed to talk, to rail at life....

"Ech!" he said with a sigh. "You ask how I am living. How do we live here? Why, not at all. We grow old, we grow stout, we grow slack. Day after day passes; life slips by without colour, without expressions, without thoughts.... In the daytime working for gain, and in the evening the club, the company of card-players, alcoholic, raucous-voiced gentlemen whom I can't endure. What is there nice in it?"

"Well, you have work--a noble object in life. You used to be so fond of talking of your hospital. I was such a queer girl then; I imagined myself such a great pianist. Nowadays all young ladies play the piano, and I played, too, like everybody else, and there was nothing special about me. I am just such a pianist as my mother is an authoress. And of course I didn't understand you then, but afterwards in Moscow I often thought of you. I thought of no one but you. What happiness to be a district doctor; to help the suffering; to be serving the people! What happiness!" Ekaterina Ivanovna repeated with enthusiasm. "When I thought of you in Moscow, you seemed to me so ideal, so lofty...."

Startsev thought of the notes he used to take out of his pockets in the evening with such pleasure, and the glow in his heart was quenched.

He got up to go into the house. She took his arm.

"You are the best man I've known in my life," she went on. "We will see each other and talk, won't we? Promise me. I am not a pianist; I am not in error about myself now, and I will not play before you or talk of music."

When they had gone into the house, and when Startsev saw in the lamplight her face, and her sad, grateful, searching eyes fixed upon him, he felt uneasy and thought again:

"It's a good thing I did not marry her then."

He began taking leave.

"You have no human right to go before supper," said Ivan Petrovitch as

he saw him off. "It's extremely perpendicular on your part. Well, now, perform!" he added, addressing Pava in the hall.

Pava, no longer a boy, but a young man with moustaches, threw himself into an attitude, flung up his arm, and said in a tragic voice:

"Unhappy woman, die!"

All this irritated Startsev. Getting into his carriage, and looking at the dark house and garden which had once been so precious and so dear, he thought of everything at once--Vera Iosifovna's novels and Kitten's noisy playing, and Ivan Petrovitch's jokes and Pava's tragic posturing, and thought if the most talented people in the town were so futile, what must the town be?

Three days later Pava brought a letter from Ekaterina Ivanovna.

"You don't come and see us--why?" she wrote to him. "I am afraid that you have changed towards us. I am afraid, and I am terrified at the very thought of it. Reassure me; come and tell me that everything is well.

"I must talk to you.--Your E. I."

* * * * *

He read this letter, thought a moment, and said to Pava:

"Tell them, my good fellow, that I can't come to-day; I am very busy. Say I will come in three days or so."

But three days passed, a week passed; he still did not go. Happening once to drive past the Turkins' house, he thought he must go in, if only for a moment, but on second thoughts ... did not go in.

And he never went to the Turkins' again.

V

Several more years have passed. Startsev has grown stouter still, has grown corpulent, breathes heavily, and already walks with his head thrown back. When stout and red in the face, he drives with his bells and his team of three horses, and Panteleimon, also stout and red in the face with his thick beefy neck, sits on the box, holding his arms stiffly out before him as though they were made of wood, and shouts to those he meets: "Keep to the ri-i-ight!" it is an impressive picture; one might think it was not a mortal, but some heathen deity in his chariot. He has an immense practice in the town, no time to breathe, and already has an estate and two houses in the town, and he is looking out

for a third more profitable; and when at the Mutual Credit Bank he is told of a house that is for sale, he goes to the house without ceremony, and, marching through all the rooms, regardless of half-dressed women and children who gaze at him in amazement and alarm, he prods at the doors with his stick, and says:

"Is that the study? Is that a bedroom? And what's here?"

And as he does so he breathes heavily and wipes the sweat from his brow.

He has a great deal to do, but still he does not give up his work as district doctor; he is greedy for gain, and he tries to be in all places at once. At Dyalizh and in the town he is called simply "Ionitch": "Where is Ionitch off to?" or "Should not we call in Ionitch to a consultation?"

Probably because his throat is covered with rolls of fat, his voice has changed; it has become thin and sharp. His temper has changed, too: he has grown ill-humoured and irritable. When he sees his patients he is usually out of temper; he impatiently taps the floor with his stick, and shouts in his disagreeable voice:

"Be so good as to confine yourself to answering my questions! Don't talk so much!"

He is solitary. He leads a dreary life; nothing interests him.

During all the years he had lived at Dyalizh his love for Kitten had been his one joy, and probably his last. In the evenings he plays _vint_ at the club, and then sits alone at a big table and has supper. Ivan, the oldest and most respectable of the waiters, serves him, hands him Lafitte No. 17, and every one at the club--the members of the committee, the cook and waiters--know what he likes and what he doesn't like and do their very utmost to satisfy him, or else he is sure to fly into a rage and bang on the floor with his stick.

As he eats his supper, he turns round from time to time and puts in his spoke in some conversation:

"What are you talking about? Eh? Whom?"

And when at a neighbouring table there is talk of the Turkins, he asks:

"What Turkins are you speaking of? Do you mean the people whose daughter plays on the piano?"

That is all that can be said about him.

And the Turkins? Ivan Petrovitch has grown no older; he is not changed

in the least, and still makes jokes and tells anecdotes as of old. Vera Iosifovna still reads her novels aloud to her visitors with eagerness and touching simplicity. And Kitten plays the piano for four hours every day. She has grown visibly older, is constantly ailing, and every autumn goes to the Crimea with her mother. When Ivan Petrovitch sees them off at the station, he wipes his tears as the train starts, and shouts:

"Good-bye, if you please."

And he waves his handkerchief.

MY UNCLE SOSTHÈNE

by Guy de Maupassant

Translator: Ernest Augustus Boyd

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My uncle Sosthène was a freethinker, like many others, a freethinker from sheer stupidity. People are very often religious for the same reason. The mere sight of a priest threw him into a violent rage; he would shake his fist and grimace at him, and touch a piece of iron when the priest's back was turned, forgetting that the latter action showed a belief after all, the belief in the evil eye.

Now when beliefs are unreasonable, one should either have all or none at all. I myself am a freethinker; I revolt at all the dogmas which have invented the fear of death, but I feel no anger toward places of worship, be they Catholic Apostolic, Roman, Protestant, Greek, Russian, Buddhist, Jewish, or Mohammedan. I have a peculiar manner of looking at them and explaining them. A place of worship represents the homage paid by man to the unknown. The more extended our thoughts and our views become, the more the unknown diminishes, and the more places of worship will decay. I, however, instead of incense burners, would fit them up with telescopes, microscopes, and electrical machines; that is all.

My uncle and I differed on nearly every point. He was a patriot, while I was not--for, after all, patriotism is a kind of religion; it is the egg from which wars are hatched.

My uncle was a Freemason, and I used to declare that they are stupider than the pious old ladies. That is my opinion, and I maintain it; if we must have any religion at all, the old one is good enough for me.

Those imbeciles simply imitate priests. Their symbol is a triangle instead of a cross. They have chapels which they call lodges, and a whole

lot of different sects: the Scottish rite, the French rite, the Grand Orient, a collection of balderdash that would make a cat laugh.

What is their object? Mutual help to be obtained by tickling the palms of each other's hands. I see no harm in it, for they put into practice the Christian precept: "Do unto others as ye would they should do unto you." The only difference consists in the tickling, but it does not seem worth while to make such a fuss about lending a poor devil five francs.

Convents whose duty and business it is to administer alms and help, put the letters "J.M.J." at the head of their communications. The Masons put three periods in a row after their signature. It is six of one and half a dozen of the other.

My uncle's reply used to be:

"We are raising up a religion against a religion; Free-thought will kill clericalism. Freemasonry is the headquarters of those who are demolishing all deities."

"Very well, my dear uncle," I would reply (in my heart I felt inclined to say, "You old idiot!"); "it is just that which I am blaming you for. Instead of destroying, you are organizing competition; it is only a case of lowering the prices. And then, if you only admitted freethinkers among you I could understand it, but you admit anybody. You have a number of Catholics among you, even the leaders of the party. Pius IX is said to have been one of you before he became Pope. If you call a society with such an organization a bulwark against clericalism, I think it is an extremely weak one."

"My dear boy," my uncle would reply, with a wink, "our most formidable actions are political; slowly and surely we are everywhere undermining the monarchical spirit."

Then I broke out: "Yes, you are very clever! If you tell me that freemasonry is an election-machine, I will grant it. I will never deny that it is used as a machine to control candidates of all shades; if you say that it is only used to hoodwink people, to drill them to go to the voting-urn as soldiers are sent under fire, I agree with you; if you declare that it is indispensable to all political ambitions because it changes all its members into electoral agents, I should say to you, 'That is as clear as daylight.' But when you tell me that it serves to undermine the monarchical spirit, I can only laugh in your face."

"Just consider that vast and democratic association which had Prince Napoleon for its Grand Master under the Empire; which has the Crown Prince for its Grand Master in Germany, the Czar's brother in Russia, and to which the Prince of Wales and King Humbert and nearly all the royalists of the globe belong."

"You are quite right," my uncle said; "but all these persons are serving our projects without knowing it."

"And vice versa, what?"

And I added, to myself, "pack of fools!"

It was, however, indeed a sight to see my uncle when he had a freemason to dinner.

On meeting they shook hands in a mysterious manner that was irresistibly funny; one could see that they were going through a series of secret mysterious pressures. When I wished to put my uncle in a rage, I had only to tell him that dogs also have a manner which savours very much of freemasonry, when they greet one another on meeting.

Then my uncle would take his friend into a corner to tell him something important, and at dinner they had a peculiar way of looking at each other, and of drinking to each other, in a manner as if to say: "We belong to it, don't we?"

And to think that there are millions on the face of the globe who are amused at such monkey tricks! I would sooner be a Jesuit.

Now in our town there really was an old Jesuit who was my uncle's pet aversion. Every time he met him, or if he only saw him at a distance, he used to say: "Dirty skunk!" And then, taking my arm, he would whisper to me:

"Look here, that fellow will play me a trick some day or other, I feel sure of it."

My uncle spoke quite truly, and this was how it happened, through my fault moreover.

It was close on Holy Week, and my uncle made up his mind to give a dinner on Good Friday, a real dinner with chitterlings and saveloy sausage. I resisted as much as I could, and said:

"I shall eat meat on that day, but at home, quite by myself. Your manifesto, as you call it, is an idiotic idea. Why should you manifest? What does it matter to you if people do not eat any meat?"

But my uncle would not be persuaded. He asked three of his friends to dine with him at one of the best restaurants in the town, and as he was going to pay the bill, I had certainly, after all, no scruples about _manifesting._

At four o'clock we took a conspicuous place in the Café Pénélope, the most frequented restaurant in the town, and my uncle in a loud voice described the menu.

We sat down at six o'clock, and at ten o'clock we had not finished. Five of us had drunk eighteen bottles of fine wines, and four of champagne. Then my uncle proposed what he was in the habit of calling: "The archbishop's feat." Each man put six small glasses in front of him, each of them filled with a different liqueur, and then they had all to be emptied at one gulp, one after another, while one of the waiters counted twenty. It was very stupid, but my uncle thought it was very suitable to the occasion.

At eleven o'clock he was as drunk as a fiddler, so we had to take him home in a cab and put him to bed, and one could easily foresee that his anti-clerical demonstration would end in a terrible fit of indigestion.

As I was going back to my lodgings, being rather drunk myself, with a cheerful Machiavelian drunkenness which quite satisfied all my skeptical instincts, an idea struck me.

I arranged my necktie, put on a look of great distress, and went and rang loudly at the old Jesuit's door. As he was deaf he made me wait a longish while, but at length he appeared at his window in a cotton nightcap and asked what I wanted.

I shouted out at the top of my voice:

"Make haste, reverend father, and open the door; a poor, despairing, sick man is in need of your spiritual ministrations."

The good, kind man put on his trousers as quickly as he could and came down without his cassock. I told him in a breathless voice that my uncle, the freethinker, had been taken suddenly ill. Fearing it was going to be something serious he had been seized with a sudden fear of death, and wished to see a priest and talk to him; to have his advice and comfort, to make up with the Church, and to confess, so as to be able to cross the dreaded threshold at peace with himself; and I added in a mocking tone:

"At any rate, he wishes it, and if it does him no good it can do him no harm."

The old Jesuit, who was startled, delighted, and almost trembling, said to me:

"Wait a moment, my son, I will come with you."

But I replied: "Pardon me. Father, if I do not go with you; but my convictions will not allow me to do so. I even refused to come and fetch

you, so I beg you not to say that you have seen me, but to declare that you had a presentiment--a sort of revelation of his illness."

The priest consented, and went off quickly, knocked at my uncle's door, was soon let in, and I saw the black cassock disappear within that stronghold of Free-thought.

I hid under a neighbouring gateway to wait for events. Had he been well, my uncle would have half murdered the Jesuit, but I knew that he would be unable to move an arm, and I asked myself, gleefully, what sort of a scene would take place between these antagonists--what fight, what explanation would be given, and what would be the issue of this situation, which my uncle's indignation would render more tragic still?

I laughed till I had to hold my sides, and said to myself, half aloud: "Oh! what a joke, what a joke!"

Meanwhile it was getting very cold. I noticed that the Jesuit stayed a long time, and thought: "They are having an explanation, I suppose."

One, two, three hours passed, and still the reverend Father did not come out. What had happened? Had my uncle died in a fit when he saw him, or had he killed the cassocked gentleman? Perhaps they had mutually devoured each other? This last supposition appeared very unlikely, for I fancied that my uncle was quite incapable of swallowing a grain more nourishment at that moment.

At last the day dawned. I was very uneasy, and not venturing to go into the house myself, I went to one of my friends who lived opposite. I roused him, explained matters to him, much to his amusement and astonishment, and took possession of his window.

At nine o'clock he relieved me and I got a little sleep. At two o'clock I, in my turn, replaced him. We were utterly astonished.

At six o'clock the Jesuit left, with a very happy and satisfied look on his face, and we saw him go away with a quiet step.

Then, timid and ashamed, I went and knocked at my uncle's door. When the servant opened it I did not dare to ask her any questions, but went upstairs without saying a word.

My uncle was lying pale, exhausted, with weary, sorrowful eyes and heavy arms, on his bed. A little religious picture was fastened to one of the bed-curtains with a pin.

"Why, uncle," I said, "you in bed still? Are you not well?"

He replied in a feeble voice:

"Oh! my dear boy, I have been very ill; nearly dead."

"How was that, uncle?"

"I don't know; it was most surprising. But what is stranger still, is that the Jesuit priest who has just left--you know, that excellent man whom I have made such fun of--had a divine revelation of my state, and came to see me."

I was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to laugh, and with difficulty said: "Oh, really!"

"Yes, he came. He heard a Voice telling him to get up and come to me, because I was going to die. It was a revelation."

I pretended to sneeze, so as not to burst out laughing; I felt inclined to roll on the ground with amusement.

In about a minute I managed to say, indignantly: "And you received him, uncle, you? You, a freethinker, a freemason? You did not have him thrown out?"

He seemed confused, and stammered:

"Listen a moment, it is so astonishing--so astonishing and providential! He also spoke to me about my father; he knew him formerly."

"Your father, uncle? But that is no reason for receiving a Jesuit."

"I know that, but I was very ill, and he looked after me most devotedly all night long. He was perfect; no doubt he saved my life; those men are all more or less doctors."

"Oh! he looked after you all night? But you said just now that he had only been gone a very short time."

"That is quite true; I kept him to breakfast after all his kindness. He had it at a table by my bedside while I drank a cup of tea."

"And he ate meat?"

My uncle looked vexed, as if I had said something very much out of place, and then added:

"Don't joke, Gaston; such things are out of place at times. He has shown me more devotion than many a relation would have done and I expect you to respect his convictions."

This rather upset me, but I answered, nevertheless: "Very well, uncle; and what did you do after breakfast?"

"We played a game of bezique, and then he repeated his breviary while I read a little book which he happened to have in his pocket, and which was not by any means badly written."

"A religious book, uncle?"

"Yes, and no, or rather--no. It is the history of their missions in Central Africa, and is rather a book of travels and adventures. What these men have done is very good."

I began to feel that matters were going badly, so I got up. "Well, good-bye, uncle," I said, "I see you are going to leave freemasonry for religion; you are a renegade."

He was still rather confused, and stammered:

"Well, but religion is a sort of freemasonry."

"When is your Jesuit coming back?" I asked.

"I don't--I don't know exactly; to-morrow, perhaps; but it is not certain."

I went out, altogether overwhelmed.

My joke turned out very badly for me! My uncle became radically converted, and if that had been all I should not have cared so much. Clerical or freemason, to me it is all the same; six of one and half a dozen of the other; but the worst of it is that he has just made his will--yes, made his will--and has disinherited me in favor of that holy Jesuit!

COUNTRY FOLK

by Isaac Dob Berkowitz

Translator: Helena Frank

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Feivke was a wild little villager, about seven years old, who had tumbled up from babyhood among Gentile urchins, the only Jewish boy in the place, just as his father Mattes, the Kozlov smith, was the only Jewish householder there. Feivke had hardly ever met, or even seen, anyone but the people of Kozlov and their children. Had it not been for his black eyes, with their moody, persistent gaze from beneath the shade of a deep, worn-out leather cap, it would have puzzled anyone to make out his parentage, to know whence that torn and battered face, that red scar across the top lip, those large, black, flat, unchild-like feet. But the eyes explained everything--his mother's eyes.

Feivke spent the whole summer with the village urchins in the neighboring wood, picking mushrooms, climbing the trees, driving wood-pigeons off their high nests, or wading knee-deep in the shallow bog outside to seek the black, slippery bog-worms; or else he found himself out in the fields, jumping about on the top of a load of hay under a hot sky, and shouting to his companions, till he was bathed in perspiration. At other times, he gathered himself away into a dark, cool barn, scrambled at the peril of his life along a round beam under the roof, crunched dried pears, saw how the sun sprinkled the darkness with a thousand sparks, and--thought. He could always think about Mikita, the son of the village elder, who had almost risen to be conductor on a railway train, and who came from a long way off to visit his father, brass buttons to his coat and a purse full of silver rubles, and piped to the village girls of an evening on the most cunning kind of whistle.

How often it had happened that Feivke could not be found, and did not even come home to bed! But his parents troubled precious little about him, seeing that he was growing up a wild, dissolute boy, and the displeasure of Heaven rested on his head.

Feivke was not a timid child, but there were two things he was afraid of: God and davvening. Feivke had never, to the best of his recollection, seen God, but he often heard His name, they threatened him with It, glanced at the ceiling, and sighed. And this embittered somewhat his sweet, free days. He felt that the older he grew, the sooner he would have to present himself before this terrifying, stern, and unfamiliar God, who was hidden somewhere, whether near or far he could not tell. One day Feivke all but ran a danger. It was early on a winter morning; there was a cold, wild wind blowing outside, and indoors there was a black stranger Jew, in a thick sheepskin, breaking open the tin charity boxes. The smith's wife served the stranger with hot

potatoes and sour milk, whereupon the stranger piously closed his eyes, and, having reopened them, caught sight of Feivke through the white steam rising from the dish of potatoes--Feivke, huddled up in a corner--and beckoned him nearer.

"Have you begun to learn, little boy?" he questioned, and took his cheek between two pale, cold fingers, which sent a whiff of snuff up Feivke's nose. His mother, standing by the stove, reddened, and made some inaudible answer. The black stranger threw up his eyes, and slowly shook his head inside the wide sheepskin collar. This shaking to and fro of his head boded no good, and Feivke grew strangely cold inside. Then he grew hot all over, and, for several nights after, thousands of long, cold, pale fingers pursued and pinched him in his dreams.

They had never yet taught him to recite his prayers. Kozlov was a lonely village, far from any Jewish settlement. Every Sabbath morning Feivke, snug in bed, watched his father put on a mended black cloak, wrap himself in the Tallis, shut his eyes, take on a bleating voice, and, turning to the wall, commence a series of bows. Feivke felt that his father was bowing before God, and this frightened him. He thought it a very rash proceeding. Feivke, in his father's place, would sooner have had nothing to do with God. He spent most of the time while his father was at his prayers cowering under the coverlet, and only crept out when he heard his mother busy with plates and spoons, and the pungent smell of chopped radishes and onions penetrated to the bedroom.

Winters and summers passed, and Feivke grew to be seven years old, just such a Feivke as we have described. And the last summer passed, and gave way to autumn.

That autumn the smith's wife was brought to bed of a seventh child, and before she was about again, the cold, damp days were upon them, with the misty mornings, when a fish shivers in the water. And the days of her confinement were mingled for the lonely village Jewess with the Solemn Days of that year into a hard and dreary time. She went slowly about the house, as in a fog, without help or hope, and silent as a shadow. That year they all led a dismal life. The elder children, girls, went out to service in the neighboring towns, to make their own way among strangers. The peasants had become sharper and worse than formerly, and the smith's strength was not what it had been. So his wife resolved to send the two men of the family, Mattes and Feivke, to a Minyan this Yom Kippur. Maybe, if two went, God would not be able to resist them, and would soften His heart.

One morning, therefore, Mattes the smith washed, donned his mended Sabbath cloak, went to the window, and blinked through it with his red and swollen eyes. It was the Eve of the Day of Atonement. The room was well-warmed, and there was a smell of freshly-stewed carrots. The smith's wife went out to seek Feivke through the village, and brought

him home dishevelled and distracted, and all of a glow. She had torn him away from an early morning of excitement and delight such as could never, never be again. Mikita, the son of the village elder, had put his father's brown colt into harness for the first time. The whole contingent of village boys had been present to watch the fiery young animal twisting between the shafts, drawing loud breaths into its dilated and quivering nostrils, looking wildly at the surrounding boys, and stamping impatiently, as though it would have liked to plow away the earth from under its feet. And suddenly it had given a bound and started careering through the village with the cart behind it. There was a glorious noise and commotion! Feivke was foremost among those who, in a cloud of dust and at the peril of their life, had dashed to seize the colt by the reins.

His mother washed him, looked him over from the low-set leather hat down to his great, black feet, stuffed a packet of food into his hands, and said:

"Go and be a good and devout boy, and God will forgive you."

She stood on the threshold of the house, and looked after her two men starting for a distant Minyan. The bearing of seven children had aged and weakened the once hard, obstinate woman, and, left standing alone in the doorway, watching her poor, barefoot, perverse-natured boy on his way to present himself for the first time before God, she broke down by the Mezuzeh and wept.

Silently, step by step, Feivke followed his father between the desolate stubble fields. It was a good ten miles' walk to the large village where the Minyan assembled, and the fear and the wonder in Feivke's heart increased all the way. He did not yet quite understand whither he was being taken, and what was to be done with him there, and the impetus of the brown colt's career through the village had not as yet subsided in his head. Why had Father put on his black mended cloak? Why had he brought a Tallis with him, and a white shirt-like garment? There was certainly some hour of calamity and terror ahead, something was preparing which had never happened before.

They went by the great Kozlov wood, wherein every tree stood silent and sad for its faded and fallen leaves. Feivke dropped behind his father, and stepped aside into the wood. He wondered: Should he run away and hide in the wood? He would willingly stay there for the rest of his life. He would foregather with Nasta, the barrel-maker's son, he of the knocked-out eye; they would roast potatoes out in the wood, and now and again, stolen-wise, milk the village cows for their repast. Let them beat him as much as they pleased, let them kill him on the spot, nothing should induce him to leave the wood again!

But no! As Feivke walked along under the silent trees and through the

fallen leaves, and perceived that the whole wood was filled through and through with a soft, clear light, and heard the rustle of the leaves beneath his step, a strange terror took hold of him. The wood had grown so sparse, the trees so discolored, and he should have to remain in the stillness alone, and roam about in the winter wind!

Mattes the smith had stopped, wondering, and was blinking around with his sick eyes.

"Feivke, where are you?"

Feivke appeared out of the wood.

"Feivke, to-day you mustn't go into the wood. To-day God may yet--to-day you must be a good boy," said the smith, repeating his wife's words as they came to his mind, "and you must say Amen."

Feivke hung his head and looked at his great, bare, black feet. "But if I don't know how," he said sullenly.

"It's no great thing to say Amen!" his father replied encouragingly.

"When you hear the other people say it, you can say it, too! Everyone must say Amen, then God will forgive them," he added, recalling again his wife and her admonitions.

Feivke was silent, and once more followed his father step by step. What will they ask him, and what is he to answer? It seemed to him now that they were going right over away yonder where the pale, scarcely-tinted sky touched the earth. There, on a hill, sits a great, old God in a large sheepskin cloak. Everyone goes up to him, and He asks them questions, which they have to answer, and He shakes His head to and fro inside the sheepskin collar. And what is he, a wild, ignorant little boy, to answer this great, old God?

Feivke had committed a great many transgressions concerning which his mother was constantly admonishing him, but now he was thinking only of two great transgressions committed recently, of which his mother knew nothing. One with regard to Anishka the beggar. Anishka was known to the village, as far back as it could remember, as an old, blind beggar, who went the round of the villages, feeling his way with a long stick. And one day Feivke and another boy played him a trick: they placed a ladder in his way, and Anishka stumbled and fell, hurting his nose. Some peasants had come up and caught Feivke. Anishka sat in the middle of the road with blood on his face, wept bitterly, and declared that God would not forget his blood that had been spilt. The peasants had given the little Zhydek a sound thrashing, but Feivke felt now as if that would not count: God would certainly remember the spilling of Anishka's blood.

Feivke's second hidden transgression had been committed outside the

village, among the graves of the peasants. A whole troop of boys, Feivke in their midst, had gone pigeon hunting, aiming at the pigeons with stones, and a stone of Feivke's had hit the naked figure on the cross that stood among the graves. The Gentile boys had started and taken fright, and those among them who were Feivke's good friends told him he had actually hit the son of God, and that the thing would have consequences; it was one for which people had their heads cut off.

These two great transgressions now stood before him, and his heart warned him that the hour had come when he would be called to account for what he had done to Anishka and to God's son. Only he did not know what answer he could make.

By the time they came near the windmill belonging to the large strange village, the sun had begun to set. The village river with the trees beside it were visible a long way off, and, crossing the river, a long high bridge.

"The Minyan is there," and Mattes pointed his finger at the thatched roofs shining in the sunset.

Feivke looked down from the bridge into the deep, black water that lay smooth and still in the shadow of the trees. The bridge was high and the water deep! Feivke felt sick at heart, and his mouth was dry.

"But, Tate, I won't be able to answer," he let out in despair.

"What, not Amen? Eh, eh, you little silly, that is no great matter. Where is the difficulty? One just ups and answers!" said his father, gently, but Feivke heard that the while his father was trying to quiet him, his own voice trembled.

At the other end of the bridge there appeared the great inn with the covered terrace, and in front of the building were moving groups of Jews in holiday garb, with red handkerchiefs in their hands, women in yellow silk head-kerchiefs, and boys in new clothes holding small prayer-books. Feivke remained obstinately outside the crowd, and hung about the stable, his black eyes staring defiantly from beneath the worn-out leather cap. But he was not left alone long, for soon there came to him a smart, yellow-haired boy, with restless little light-colored eyes, and a face like a chicken's, covered with freckles. This little boy took a little bottle with some essence in it out of his pocket, gave it a twist and a flourish in the air, and suddenly applied it to Feivke's nose, so that the strong waters spurted into his nostril. Then he asked:

"To whom do you belong?"

Feivke blew the water out of his nose, and turned his head away in silence.

"Listen, turkey, lazy dog! What are you doing there? Have you said Minchah?"

"N-no...."

"Is the Jew in a torn cloak there your father?"

"Y-yes ... T-tate...."

The yellow-haired boy took Feivke by the sleeve.

"Come along, and you'll see what they'll do to your father."

Inside the room into which Feivke was dragged by his new friend, it was hot, and there was a curious, unfamiliar sound. Feivke grew dizzy. He saw Jews bowing and bending along the wall and beating their breasts--now they said something, and now they wept in an odd way. People coughed and spat sobbingly, and blew their noses with their red handkerchiefs. Chairs and stiff benches creaked, while a continual clatter of plates and spoons came through the wall.

In a corner, beside a heap of hay, Feivke saw his father where he stood, looking all round him, blinking shamefacedly and innocently with his weak, red eyes. Round him was a lively circle of little boys whispering with one another in evident expectation.

"That is his boy, with the lip," said the chicken-face, presenting Feivke.

At the same moment a young man came up to Mattes. He wore a white collar without a tie and with a pointed brass stud. This young man held a whip, which he brandished in the air like a rider about to mount his horse.

"Well, Reb Smith."

"Am I ... I suppose I am to lie down?" asked Mattes, subserviently, still smiling round in the same shy and yet confiding manner.

"Be so good as to lie down."

The young man gave a mischievous look at the boys, and made a gesture in the air with the whip.

Mattes began to unbutton his cloak, and slowly and cautiously let himself down onto the hay, whereupon the young man applied the whip with might and main, and his whole face shone.

"One, two, three! Go on, Rebbe, go on!" urged the boys, and there were

shouts of laughter.

Feivke looked on in amaze. He wanted to go and take his father by the sleeve, make him get up and escape, but just then Mattes raised himself to a sitting posture, and began to rub his eyes with the same shy smile.

"Now, Rebbe, this one!" and the yellow-haired boy began to drag Feivke towards the hay. The others assisted. Feivke got very red, and silently tried to tear himself out of the boy's hands, making for the door, but the other kept his hold. In the doorway Feivke glared at him with his obstinate black eyes, and said:

"I'll knock your teeth out!"

"Mine? You? You booby, you lazy thing! This is our house! Do you know, on New Year's Eve I went with my grandfather to the town! I shall call Leibritz. He'll give you something to remember him by!"

And Leibritz was not long in joining them. He was the inn driver, a stout youth of fifteen, in a peasant smock with a collar stitched in red, otherwise in full array, with linen socks and a handsome bottle of strong waters against faintness in his hands. To judge by the size of the bottle, his sturdy looks belied a peculiarly delicate constitution. He pushed towards Feivke with one shoulder, in no friendly fashion, and looked at him with one eye, while he winked with the other at the freckled grandson of the host.

"Who is the beauty?"

"How should I know? A thief most likely. The Kozlov smith's boy. He threatened to knock out my teeth."

"So, so, dear brother mine!" sang out Leibritz, with a cold sneer, and passed his five fingers across Feivke's nose. "We must rub a little horseradish under his eyes, and he'll weep like a beaver. Listen, you Kozlov urchin, you just keep your hands in your pockets, because Leibritz is here! Do you know Leibritz? Lucky for you that I have a Jewish heart: to-day is Yom Kippur."

But the chicken-faced boy was not pacified.

"Did you ever see such a lip? And then he comes to our house and wants to fight us!"

The whole lot of boys now encircled Feivke with teasing and laughter, and he stood barefooted in their midst, looking at none of them, and reminding one of a little wild animal caught and tormented.

It grew dark, and quantities of soul-lights were set burning down the

long tables of the inn. The large building was packed with red-faced, perspiring Jews, in flowing white robes and Tallitim. The Confession was already in course of fervent recital, there was a great rocking and swaying over the prayer-books and a loud noise in the ears, everyone present trying to make himself heard above the rest. Village Jews are simple and ignorant, they know nothing of "silent prayer" and whispering with the lips. They are deprived of prayer in common a year at a time, and are distant from the Lord of All, and when the Awful Day comes, they want to take Him by storm, by violence. The noisiest of all was the prayer-leader himself, the young man with the white collar and no tie. He was from town, and wished to convince the country folk that he was an adept at his profession and to be relied on. Feivke stood in the stifling room utterly confounded. The prayers and the wailful chanting passed over his head like waves, his heart was straitened, red sparks whirled before his eyes. He was in a state of continual apprehension. He saw a snow-white old Jew come out of a corner with a scroll of the Torah wrapped in a white velvet, gold-embroidered cover. How the gold sparkled and twinkled and reflected itself in the illuminated beard of the old man! Feivke thought the moment had come, but he saw it all as through a mist, a long way off, to the sound of the wailful chanting, and as in a mist the scroll and the old man vanished together. Feivke's face and body were flushed with heat, his knees shook, and at the same time his hands and feet were cold as ice.

Once, while Feivke was standing by the table facing the bright flames of the soul-lights, a dizziness came over him, and he closed his eyes. Thousands of little bells seemed to ring in his ears. Then some one gave a loud thump on the table, and there was silence all around. Feivke started and opened his eyes. The sudden stillness frightened him, and he wanted to move away from the table, but he was walled in by men in white robes, who had begun rocking and swaying anew. One of them pushed a prayer-book towards him, with great black letters, which hopped and fluttered to Feivke's eyes like so many little black birds.

He shook visibly, and the men looked at him in silence: "Nu-nu, nu-nu!" He remained for some time squeezed against the prayer-book, hemmed in by the tall, strange men in robes swaying and praying over his head. A cold perspiration broke out over him, and when at last he freed himself, he felt very tired and weak. Having found his way to a corner close to his father, he fell asleep on the floor.

There he had a strange dream. He dreamt that he was a tree, growing like any other tree in a wood, and that he saw Anishka coming along with blood on his face, in one hand his long stick, and in the other a stone--and Feivke recognized the stone with which he had hit the crucifix. And Anishka kept turning his head and making signs to some one with his long stick, calling out to him that here was Feivke. Feivke looked hard, and there in the depths of the wood was God Himself, white all over, like freshly-fallen snow. And God suddenly grew ever so tall,

and looked down at Feivke. Feivke felt God looking at him, but he could not see God, because there was a mist before his eyes. And Anishka came nearer and nearer with the stone in his hand. Feivke shook, and cold perspiration oozed out all over him. He wanted to run away, but he seemed to be growing there like a tree, like all the other trees of the wood.

Feivke awoke on the floor, amid sleeping men, and the first thing he saw was a tall, barefoot person all in white, standing over the sleepers with something in his hand. This tall, white figure sank slowly onto its knees, and, bending silently over Mattes the smith, who lay snoring with the rest, it deliberately put a bottle to his nose. Mattes gave a squeal, and sat up hastily.

"Ha, who is it?" he asked in alarm.

It was the young man from town, the prayer-leader, with a bottle of strong smelling-salts.

"It is I," he said with a *dégagé* air, and smiled. "Never mind, it will do you good! You are fasting, and there is an express law in the Chayyé Odom on the subject."

"But why me?" complained Mattes, blinking at him reproachfully. "What have I done to you?"

Day was about to dawn. The air in the room had cooled down; the soul-lights were still playing in the dark, dewy window-panes. A few of the men bedded in the hay on the floor were waking up. Feivke stood in the middle of the room with staring eyes. The young man with the smelling-bottle came up to him with a lively air.

"O you little object! What are you staring at me for? Do you want a sniff? There, then, sniff!"

Feivke retreated into a corner, and continued to stare at him in bewilderment.

No sooner was it day, than the davvening recommenced with all the fervor of the night before, the room was as noisy, and very soon nearly as hot. But it had not the same effect on Feivke as yesterday, and he was no longer frightened of Anishka and the stone--the whole dream had dissolved into thin air. When they once more brought out the scroll of the Law in its white mantle, Feivke was standing by the table, and looked on indifferently while they uncovered the black, shining, crowded letters. He looked indifferently at the young man from town swaying over the Torah, out of which he read fluently, intoning with a strangely free and easy manner, like an adept to whom all this was nothing new. Whenever he stopped reading, he threw back his head, and looked down at

the people with a bright, satisfied smile.

The little boys roamed up and down the room in socks, with smelling-salts in their hands, or yawned into their little prayer-books. The air was filled with the dust of the trampled hay. The sun looked in at a window, and the soul-lights grew dim as in a mist. It seemed to Feivke he had been at the Minyan a long, long time, and he felt as though some great misfortune had befallen him. Fear and wonder continued to oppress him, but not the fear and wonder of yesterday. He was tired, his body burning, while his feet were contracted with cold. He got away outside, stretched himself out on the grass behind the inn and dozed, facing the sun. He dozed there through a good part of the day. Bright red rivers flowed before his eyes, and they made his brains ache. Some one, he did not know who, stood over him, and never stopped rocking to and fro and reciting prayers. Then--it was his father bending over him with a rather troubled look, and waking him in a strangely gentle voice:

"Well, Feivke, are you asleep? You've had nothing to eat to-day yet?"

"No...."

Feivke followed his father back into the house on his unsteady feet. Weary Jews with pale and lengthened noses were resting on the terrace and the benches. The sun was already low down over the village and shining full into the inn windows. Feivke stood by one of the windows with his father, and his head swam from the bright light. Mattes stroked his chin-beard continually, then there was more davvening and more rocking while they recited the Eighteen Benedictions. The Benedictions ended, the young man began to trill, but in a weaker voice and without charm. He was sick of the whole thing, and kept on in the half-hearted way with which one does a favor. Mattes forgot to look at his prayer-book, and, standing in the window, gazed at the tree-tops, which had caught fire in the rays of the setting sun. Nobody was expecting anything of him, when he suddenly gave a sob, so loud and so piteous that all turned and looked at him in astonishment. Some of the people laughed. The prayer-leader had just intoned "Michael on the right hand uttereth praise," out of the Afternoon Service. What was there to cry about in that? All the little boys had assembled round Mattes the smith, and were choking with laughter, and a certain youth, the host's new son-in-law, gave a twitch to Mattes' Tallis:

"Reb Kozlover, you've made a mistake!"

Mattes answered not a word. The little fellow with the freckles pushed his way up to him, and imitating the young man's intonation, repeated, "Reb Kozlover, you've made a mistake!"

Feivke looked wildly round at the bystanders, at his father. Then he suddenly advanced to the freckled boy, and glared at him with his black

eyes.

"You, you--kob tebi biessi!" he hissed in Little-Russian.

The laughter and commotion increased; there was an exclamation: "Rascal, in a holy place!" and another: "Aha! the Kozlover smith's boy must be a first-class scamp!" The prayer-leader thumped angrily on his prayer-book, because no one was listening to him.

Feivke escaped once more behind the inn, but the whole company of boys followed him, headed by Leibritz the driver.

"There he is, the Kozlov lazy booby!" screamed the freckled boy. "Have you ever heard the like? He actually wanted to fight again, and in our house! What do you think of that?"

Leibritz went up to Feivke at a steady trot and with the gesture of one who likes to do what has to be done calmly and coolly.

"Wait, boys! Hands off! We've got a remedy for him here, for which I hope he will be thankful."

So saying, he deliberately took hold of Feivke from behind, by his two arms, and made a sign to the boy with yellow hair.

"Now for it, Aarontche, give it to the youngster!"

The little boy immediately whipped the smelling-bottle out of his pocket, took out the stopper with a flourish, and held it to Feivke's nose. The next moment Feivke had wrenched himself free, and was making for the chicken-face with nails spread, when he received two smart, sounding boxes on the ears, from two great, heavy, horny hands, which so clouded his brain that for a minute he stood dazed and dumb. Suddenly he made a spring at Leibritz, fell upon his hand, and fastened his sharp teeth in the flesh. Leibritz gave a loud yell.

There was a great to-do. People came running out in their robes, women with pale, startled faces called to their children. A few of them reproved Mattes for his son's behavior. Then they dispersed, till there remained behind the inn only Mattes and Feivke. Mattes looked at his boy in silence. He was not a talkative man, and he found only two or three words to say:

"Feivke, Mother there at home--and you--here?"

Again Feivke found himself alone on the field, and again he stretched himself out and dozed. Again, too, the red streams flowed before his eyes, and someone unknown to him stood at his head and recited prayers. Only the streams were thicker and darker, and the davvening over his

head was louder, sadder, more penetrating.

It was quite dark when Mattes came out again, took Feivke by the hand, set him on his feet, and said, "Now we are going home."

Indoors everything had come to an end, and the room had taken on a week-day look. The candles were gone, and a lamp was burning above the table, round which sat men in their hats and usual cloaks, no robes to be seen, and partook of some refreshment. There was no more davvening, but in Feivke's ears was the same ringing of bells. It now seemed to him that he saw the room and the men for the first time, and the old Jew sitting at the head of the table, presiding over bottles and wine-glasses, and clicking with his tongue, could not possibly be the old man with the silver-white beard who had held the scroll of the Law to his breast.

Mattes went up to the table, gave a cough, bowed to the company, and said, "A good year!"

The old man raised his head, and thundered so loudly that Feivke's face twitched as with pain:

"Ha?"

"I said--I am just going--going home--home again--so I wish--wish you--a good year!"

"Ha, a good year? A good year to you also! Wait, have a little brandy, ha?"

Feivke shut his eyes. It made him feel bad to have the lamp burning so brightly and the old man talking so loud. Why need he speak in such a high, rasping voice that it went through one's head like a saw?

"Ha? Is it your little boy who scratched my Aarontche's face? Ha? A rascal is he? Beat him well! There, give him a little brandy, too--and a bit of cake! He fasted too, ha? But he can't recite the prayers? Fie! _You_ ought to be beaten! Ha? Are you going home? Go in health! Ha? Your wife has just been confined?--Perhaps you need some money for the holidays? Ha? What do you say?"

Mattes and Feivke started to walk home. Mattes gave a look at the clear sky, where the young half-moon had floated into view. "Mother will be expecting us," he said, and began to walk quickly. Feivke could hardly drag his feet.

On the tall bridge they were met by a cool breeze blowing from the water. Once across the bridge, Mattes again quickened his pace. Presently he stopped to look around--no Feivke! He turned back and saw

Feivke sitting in the middle of the road. The child was huddled up in a silent, shivering heap. His teeth chattered with cold.

"Feivke, what is the matter? Why are you sitting down? Come along home!"

"I won't"--Feivke clattered out with his teeth--"I c-a-n-'t--"

"Did they hit you so hard, Feivke?"

Feivke was silent. Then he stretched himself out on the ground, his hands and feet quivering.

"Cold--."

"Aren't you well, Feivke?"

The child made an effort, sat up, and looked fixedly at his father, with his black, feverish eyes, and suddenly he asked:

"Why did you cry there? Tate, why? Tell me, why?!"

"Where did I cry, you little silly? Why, I just cried--it's Yom Kippur. Mother is fasting, too--get up, Feivke, and come home. Mother will make you a poultice," occurred to him as a happy thought.

"No! Why did you cry, while they were laughing?" Feivke insisted, still sitting in the road and shaking like a leaf. "One mustn't cry when they laugh, one mustn't!"

And he lay down again on the damp ground.

"Feivele, come home, my son!"

Mattes stood over the boy in despair, and looked around for help. From some way off, from the tall bridge, came a sound of heavy footsteps growing louder and louder, and presently the moonlight showed the figure of a peasant.

"Ai, who is that? Matke the smith? What are you doing there? Are you casting spells? Who is that lying on the ground?"

"I don't know myself what I'm doing, kind soul. That is my boy, and he won't come home, or he can't. What am I to do with him?" complained Mattes to the peasant, whom he knew.

"Has he gone crazy? Give him a kick! Ai, you little lazy devil, get up!" Feivke did not move from the spot, he only shivered silently, and his teeth chattered.

"Ach, you devil! What sort of a boy have you there, Matke? A visitation of Heaven! Why don't you beat him more? The other day they came and told tales of him--Agapa said that--"

"I don't know, either, kind soul, what sort of a boy he is," answered Mattes, and wrung his hands in desperation.

* * * * *

Early next morning Mattes hired a conveyance, and drove Feivke to the town, to the asylum for the sick poor. The smith's wife came out and saw them start, and she stood a long while in the doorway by the Mezuzeh.

And on another fine autumn morning, just when the villagers were beginning to cart loads of fresh earth to secure the village against overflowing streams, the village boys told one another the news of Feivke's death.

IN THE LOWER PASSAGE.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *Welsh Rarebit Tales*, by Harle Oren Cummins

We were sitting on the deck of the "Empress of India," homeward bound for Southampton. I was returning on a six months' leave from hospital duty in Calcutta, and the Colonel was retiring from his post in the northern provinces, where he had served with credit for over fifteen years. He had resigned suddenly a month before. His resignation had been refused, whereupon he immediately gave up everything to his second in command, and took the next steamer home, for a year's stay, according to the belief of the home government, but with a private resolution never to return.

I knew that he had had some terrible experience in which his dearest friend, Lieutenant Arthur Stebbins, had been killed; but beyond that I was as ignorant as the home government which had refused to sanction his resignation. That night, however, as we sat on deck, and felt the lingering tremor of the giant screw which was driving us back to home and civilization, something prompted the Colonel to confide in me.

"I was not acting in my official capacity when Arthur Stebbins and I went up into the Junga district," the Colonel said in answer to a chance remark of mine, "it was simply and solely to visit the haunted city of Mubapur. You have been in India for two years, and you may have heard some of the strange tales in regard to the place; but as nearly every little out-of-the-way province in India has its peculiar tale of

hidden wealth or strange craft, you have probably paid no attention to the stories of Mubapur.

“I had heard the natives, when they thought no one was listening, speak of the lost tribe of Jadacks, which had once lived up among the Ora Mountains. It seems that they were not like other natives, but a white people almost giant in size, and their chief city was Mubapur. But years ago, some say ten, others fifty, and still others a hundred, for these natives have no idea of time, a great plague came upon the white tribe, and it was smitten from the land.

“They believed that the gods had in some way been offended, and that this people were annihilated in punishment. Anyway, we could not get one of our coolie boys within two miles of the place after nightfall; and they told strange stories of immense white creatures which flitted about the place, and of moanings and wailings which could be heard on still nights when the wind was from Mubapur.

“Stebbins and I were on a shooting expedition in the Junga district when he, remembering the wild tales he had heard, proposed that we turn aside, and make the two days’ trip to the haunted city. As time was of no particular account just then, I agreed; and after leaving our coolie bearers two miles from the town, for they refused all bribes and ignored all threats to go farther, we entered the deserted and grass-grown streets of Mubapur. It was near dark when we arrived; and we decided to put up for the night in a little temple, the roof of which still defied the action of the wind and rain, and which offered us a comfortable retreat.

“As I was building a fire just outside the entrance preparatory to getting supper, I heard Stebbins call, and hurrying in, found him standing behind the chief altar of the place, and gazing down a steep stairway which apparently led into the bowels of the earth. He put up his hand as I entered, and whispered, ‘Listen; do you hear anything?’

“I held my breath listening, and from somewhere down in the damp depths below I heard a strange sound floating upwards. It might have been a chant such as the hill men sing on the eve of battle; or it might have been only the wind soughing through underground passages, but anyway it was weird enough in its effect on both of us, so that we hurried out to the fire and busied ourselves getting supper. It is strange how differently the tales we had heard seemed in that ruined temple with night coming on, from what they had in the bright daylight in the market place at Calcutta.

“We slept very close together that night just inside the entrance to the temple, and all through the watches I fancied I heard that solemn dirge rising and falling in the stillness of the night. Once I awoke to find Stebbins talking softly, and I heard him mutter something about a

great white beast; but when I looked at him his eyes were shut, and he was sleeping soundly.

“The next morning after breakfast I asked him the question for which I knew he was waiting,--should we descend the narrow stairway into the passage? He was anxious to make the attempt; and after getting ready some torches and looking carefully to our guns, we started down the slippery stairway.

“The steps ended abruptly, and we found ourselves in a long, narrow passage. What struck me at once as peculiar as we proceeded were some little cavities in the floor at regular intervals, such as might have been made by a person walking continuously, as a prisoner walks in his cell. But the stride was nearly twice that of an ordinary man. After walking about fifty paces we came to another stairway leading to a still lower passage, and just as we were about to descend we heard a noise as of something running swiftly below us. I looked at Stebbins to see if he had seen anything, for he was nearer to the head of the stairway than I; but there was only a white, determined look on his face.

““Come on, Colonel,’ he called, and led the way down the stairs. At the farther end of this passage we came to a square opening into a kind of vault, and we paused for a moment before it. Then, in that stillness of the tomb, sixty feet below the surface of the ground, and just on the other side of the little opening, we heard a low moaning, and I would have sworn it was a man who made the sounds.

“We held our rifles a little closer, and crawled through the aperture, pausing to look about us. We both nearly dropped our guns in our excitement; for, crouched in the farther corner, was a great white, hairy creature, watching us with red, flaming eyes. Then, even before we could recover ourselves, the thing gave a kind of guttural cry of anger, and started toward us. As it rose to its feet, I swear to you I turned sick as a woman. The beast was over eight feet tall, and was covered with a thick growth of hair which was snow white. Its arms were once and a half the length of those of a common man, and its head was set low on its shoulders like that of an ape or a monkey; but the skin beneath the hair was _as white as yours or mine_.

“I heard the Lieutenant’s gun go off, but the Thing never stopped. I raised my four-bore and let drive with the left barrel; then, overcome with a nameless fear of that great white beast, I called wildly to Arthur to follow me, and plunged through the opening and ran with all my strength toward the upper passage. It was not until I felt the fresh air on my face that I stopped to take breath, and I was so weak I could scarcely stand. Then, if you can, imagine my horror to find that I was alone. The Lieutenant was nowhere in sight. I called down the passage, and I could hear my voice echoing down the dismal place, but there was

no answer.

“Think what you may; but I tell you it took more courage for me to force myself down into that vault again than it would to have walked up the steps to the scaffold. I crept fearfully along the passage, calling weakly every few minutes, and dreading what I should find; but--there was nothing to find.”

The Colonel paused, putting his hand over his eyes, and I could see by the moonlight that his face was white and drawn.

“And did you not find him in the lower passage?” I asked, when the silence had become oppressive.

“No, I did not find the Lieutenant,” he answered; “but when I came to the little square opening before the vault, there were some bloody little pieces scattered about the floor, and the place was all slippery, but there was no Lieutenant. You know it takes four horses to pull a man apart, and you can judge of the strength of that white beast when I tell you that there was not left of Arthur Stebbins a piece as big as your two hands.

“As I looked at that floor with the ghastly things which covered it, a wild rage took possession of me. I knew that the creature was in the room beyond, for I could hear a crunching as a dog makes with a bone. I rushed through the opening, straight toward the corner where it was crouching. It saw me coming, and leaped to its feet. Again that sickening fear that I had felt before came over me; but I stood my ground and waited till it nearly reached me. Then, with the muzzle of my gun almost against it, I fired both barrels full into its breast.

“I must have fainted or gone off my head after that, for the next thing I knew I was lying in a native’s hut on the Durbo road. Zur Khan, the man who owned the bungalow, said that he had found me four days before, wandering about on the plains, stark mad, and had taken me home.”

“And the Thing in the passage?” I asked breathlessly. “Did you never go back?”

“Yes; when I had recovered a little, I went back to the Mubapur Temple,” answered the Colonel; but he was silent for some minutes before he answered the first part of my question.

“In my report to the Government I said that Lieutenant Arthur Stebbins was torn to pieces in the lower passage of a Mubapur Temple by an immense white _ape_,--but I lied,” he added quietly.

HIGHER AIMS

by August Strindberg

Translated by Claud Field

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It was so cold in the little country church that the breath came like smoke from the mouths of the priest and the boys who sang in the choir. The congregation, who listened to the Mass standing, had been allowed to spread straw on the ground so that whenever they knelt at the ringing of the little bell, they should not be too chilled.

To-day there were many people at Mass, because they were expecting an unaccustomed spectacle at the end of the service. The priest was going to admonish an ill-assorted couple, who would not keep the peace and could not divorce each other because no crime had been committed. Neither of them wished to leave their children and incur the disgrace of running away. The Mass was concluded and the litany, a "Miserere," sounded pathetically from the voices which trembled with cold. The sun shone redly through the frosted window-panes, and the burning wax candles gave no light at all, but looked merely like yellow blots over which the warmed air quivered.

"Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi," sang the priest; the boys answered "Miserere!" and the congregation joined in--deep clear men's voices and high soft women's voices--"Miserere--have mercy upon us!"

The last "Miserere" sounded like a cry of despair, for at the same moment the married pair stepped from the hidden place by the door, which had been appointed for them, and went up the central aisle to the altar. The man was tall, powerfully built, with a brown beard, and limped somewhat; the woman had a small, slender figure with pliant outlines and graceful movements. Her face was half hidden by a hood, so that one only saw a pair of pale blue eyes with a suffering expression, and the upper part of her white cheeks.

The priest said a low prayer and turned to the congregation. He was a young man, not yet thirty, whose fresh, good-natured face seemed to be out of keeping with his long robe and the solemn, severe words which he uttered. He had long ago received the confessions of each of the married pair, and only delivered his admonition at the bishop's command. The discordant couple had been to the bishop and had asked him to dissolve their marriage, but the latter had found no reason to grant their request since the canonical law and the Decretals only permitted divorce on account of sin, barrenness in certain cases, and the running away of husband or wife from hearth and home.

The priest began his admonishment in a dry, expressionless voice, as though he did not believe what he said. He declared that marriage had been established by God Himself, Who had created woman from the man's rib to be a help to him; but since the man was created first and the woman subsequently, the wife should be subject to the husband, and he should be her lord.

(Here the little hood made a movement as though the wearer wished to speak.)

The man on his side should treat his wife with respect because she was his honour, and by doing so he honoured himself in his wife. This was the teaching of St Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter seven, verse four, on which passage the decree of Gratian was founded, declaring that the wife had not power over herself, but the husband.

(The little hooded figure shook from head to foot, and the man nodded approvingly at the priest's words. The priest, who now fastened his eyes on the woman, changed his tone.)

When the disciples came to Jesus and asked whether divorce was permissible for married people, he answered and said: "What God hath joined, let not man put asunder," and for this reason the Church did not allow the dissolution of marriage. The concessions made by earthly laws were only due to the wickedness of men and could not be approved by the Church.

Life was not a rose-garden, and we must not demand too much from it. The preacher himself was married (as at that time Catholic priests were allowed to be), he knew therefore how to judge in the matter; he knew that there must be give and take, if there was not to be quarrelling and strife. He had married this young couple and witnessed their first happiness; he had baptised their child and seen their love sanctified by parental joy. He reminded them of those unforgettable hours when life had given them its best and the future shone before them like a bright summer day. He adjured them by that recollection to reach each other their hands, and to forget all that had happened since the spirit of unrest had entered their hearts; he prayed them in the presence of that Christian congregation, to renew the tie which in their selfishness they had sought to dissolve.

There followed a moment of deep silence and expectation, while the congregation showed their impatience by pushing forward as far as the way they were packed together allowed. But the married pair remained motionless.

Then the priest seemed to become impatient, and in a voice trembling with annoyance and anger he again resumed. He spoke of the duties of parents towards their child, of God's wrath against an unforgiving

temper, and said plainly that marriage was not meant to be merely a means of carnal indulgence or of increasing the population, but also--and he laid emphasis on this--of family education. He gave them till the following Sunday to think it over, and bade them depart in peace.

No sooner had he spoken the last word and made a gesture of dismissal with his hand, than the young wife turned and departed. Coldly and calmly she passed between the rows of the congregation, and disappeared through the great entrance. The man hesitated a moment, then he sought the smaller door at the end of the transept.

As the priest walked home with his wife, who had been present at Mass, she said to him in a gentle but reproachful tone: "Did you believe what you said?"

"You are my conscience, dear woman, and you know my thoughts; spare me therefore a little, for the spoken word smites like a scourge."

"Then let the scourge smite! You know by their confessions that the union of this married pair is no true marriage, you know that this woman is a martyr whose life can only be saved by her keeping away from this man; you know this, and yet you exhort her to go towards her destruction."

"The Church, you see, my friend, has higher aims than the well-being of ordinary people."

"I thought that the well-being of men, what you call their salvation, was the highest aim of the Church. What then is the Church's highest aim?"

"The increase of God's kingdom on earth," answered the priest after some reflection.

"Let us consider!" said his wife. "It is said that only the saved shall dwell in God's Kingdom. Then the Church is to save men."

"In the higher sense, yes!"

"In the higher sense; are there then two?"

"A little foolish woman can ask more questions than seven wise men can answer," said the priest, and pressed his wife's hand.

"Then it is a bad look-out for the wisdom of the wise, for what will they answer when an intelligent person asks--when all the intelligent people in the world come and ask?" continued the foolish little woman.

"They will answer that they do not know," whispered the priest.

"You ought to say that aloud, and should have said it to-day in the church. Your conscience is not pleased with you to-day."

"Then I will silence my dear conscience," said the priest, and kissed his wife, who was standing in the porch of their house.

"That you cannot," she answered, "as long as you love me; and certainly not in that way."

They stamped the snow from their feet and entered the little parsonage, where they were met by two small, healthy children, who wanted to kiss their father and mother. Not the least cause of the heartiness of their welcome was the good Sunday dinner which was cooking in the oven.

The priest took off his long clerical coat and put on one more like a layman's. In this, however, he never showed himself to any member of his congregation but only to his family and the old cook. The table was laid, the floor was clean and white, and the cut fir twigs smelt sweetly. The father said grace and they took their seats at the table as glad and as much at peace with the world and with each other as though a heart had never been broken for the sake of "higher aims."

* * * * *

The snow had melted and the earth reeked and fermented with creative power. The parsonage was situated on the unsightly plain in Uppland which is included in the ecclesiastical district of Rasbo. Wherever the eye looked there was only to be seen the stony ground, the clay soil, and some elder bushes which cowered like frightened hares before the never-ceasing wind. In the distance, on the horizon, were visible the tree-tops of the edge of a wood like the masts of a ship disappearing at sea. On the south side of the house the priest had planted some trees and hoed a little patch of ground where he cultivated flowers and vegetables, which in winter had to be covered with straw since they were not accustomed to this severe climate. A small stream which came from the woods in the north ran by the parsonage, and was large enough to row a punt on, if one kept exactly in the middle.

Dominus Peder in Rasbo had awakened at sunrise, kissed his wife and children, and gone to the church which lay a few stone's-throws from the parsonage. He had read the morning Mass, blessed the work of the day, and come home again beaming with joy and cheerfulness. The larks, which certainly did not understand the difference between beauty and ugliness, had sung over the stony fields as though they blessed the meagre crop. Water flowed murmuring in the ditches on whose edges gleamed yellow colt's-foot. The priest had come home, drunk his morning milk in the porch, and now he stood in his jerkin in the garden and

released his flowers from their winter covering. He took a hoe and began to turn up the sleeping ground. The sun glowed; the work to which he was unaccustomed stirred his blood. He inhaled deep draughts of the strong spring air and felt as robust as though he had awakened to new life. His wife had opened the window-shutters on the sunny side of the house, and stood there dressing, while she watched her husband at work.

"That is better than sitting over books," he said.

"You ought to have been a peasant," she replied.

"I could not, my dear! Ah, how it does one's breast and back good! Why do people think God has given us two long arms if they are not to be used."

"Yes, one does not need them to read with."

"No! but to shovel snow, to hew wood, to dig the ground, to carry one's children, and to defend oneself--that's what they are for, and one is punished if one does not use them. We 'spiritual' men, we must not touch this sinful earth."

"Hush!" said his wife, and laid her finger on her mouth, "the children hear you."

Her husband took off his cap and wiped the perspiration from his brow.

"'In the sweat of thy brow thou shalt eat bread,' so it is written. Oh, how finely I sweat! That is something better than when anxiety at not being able to discover the sense of an obscure text makes one feel a cold sweat at the roots of one's hair, or when the spirits of doubt burn the goodness out of one's blood so that it creeps through the body like hot sand. Do you see how the flesh on my arm quivers for joy at being able to move? See how the blue veins swell like streamlets in spring when the ice melts, my chest feels so broad that the seams of the jerkin crack; that is really better----"

"Hush!" said his wife, warning him again, and added, in order to divert the dangerous current of his talk, "You have released your flowers from their strait-waistcoats, but you have forgotten the poor animals who have stood all through the winter in their dark stable."

"That is true," said the priest, and put the hoe aside; "but then the children must come out and see."

He went at once to the cattle-house which stood at the back of the row of buildings of which the farm consisted; there he set free the two cows, opened the sheep and the calf sheds, then went up the little acclivity behind and opened the door of the pigsty. First came out one

cow and stood in the door of the cow-house. The light seemed to dazzle her as she stretched out her neck and became aware of the sun; then she stepped carefully on the bridge and drew some deep breaths so that her stomach swelled; then she smelt the ground and as though seized by joyful recollections of the previous year, she erected her tail and danced up the little hill, leapt over stones and bushes and went off at full gallop. Then followed the other cow, the calves and sheep, and lastly the pigs. But behind them came the priest with a stick, for he had forgotten to shut the garden gate, and now there was a race, in which the boys eagerly joined, to drive the animals out of the enclosure. But when the old cook saw her master run up the hill in his jerkin she was anxious what people would say and rushed out from the kitchen door, while his wife stood on the steps and laughed merrily. But the young priest was so boisterous and joyful and delighted as a child at witnessing the delight of the creatures at the end of their winter imprisonment, that he forgot both congregation and bishop and ran out on to the high-road in order to drive the animals on to the fallow ground.

Then he heard his wife call his name, and when he turned round he saw a woman standing by her in the porch. Feeling ashamed and annoyed, he pulled his clothes straight, put his hair under his cap, and turned homewards assuming a solemn expression of face.

As he came nearer he recognised the little woman whom he had exhorted in the charge regarding discord in marriage. He perceived that she wished for a conversation, and asked her to come in, saying he would follow as soon as he had changed his coat.

In another coat and another mind he entered, after a time, the room where the unruly wife awaited him, and asked her business. She declared that she had come to an understanding with her husband that she should leave his house deliberately, since the Church would not grant a divorce in any other way. The priest was impatient and wished straightway to quote the Decretals and the Epistle to the Corinthians, when through the open window he heard the sound of a foot on the sanded garden-walk. He knew so well the light, soft step, and the crunching of the sand made an impression on his conscience.

"The act you contemplate, woman," he said, "is courageous, but it is nevertheless a crime."

"It is no crime; you only call it so," answered the woman decidedly, as though she had spent days and nights of despair in considering her action.

The priest was irritated, and sought in his mind for some cutting words when he heard again the sound of sharp crunching on the sand outside.

"You set a bad example to the congregation," he said.

"A worse one, if I remain," said the woman.

"You will be disinherited."

"I know."

"You will lose your reputation."

"I know that too, but I will bear it for I am innocent."

"But your child?"

"I will take it with me."

"What does your husband say to that? You have no claim on your child if you leave your home."

"Haven't I? Not on my own child? Then Solomon's wisdom itself is not sufficient to solve this tangled knot. But I will tear it in two, if I can make an end by doing so. I came to you to ask for light and you lead me into a dark passage, where you put out the light and go your way. One thing I know: where love ceases, there only shame and humiliation remain; I will not live in sin, therefore I break off."

Outside deep breaths, as of suppressed feelings, were heard. The priest struggled with himself, then he said: "As the servant of the Church, I have only to hold to the word of the Lord, and that is hard as a rock. As a man, I can only say what my heart suggests but what is perhaps sin, for the human heart is a frail thing. Go in peace, and put not asunder what God has joined."

"No, not what God has joined, but what our parents arranged. Have you not a word of comfort to say to me on the difficult path I have to tread?"

The priest shook his head negatively.

"May you not receive stones some day when you want bread," said the woman with an almost threatening look, and went out.

The priest threw off his coat again, sighed, and tried to drive away the uncomfortable feelings which the interview had caused. When he came out, he approached his wife with the remark that he was sincerely sorry for the poor woman.

"Why didn't you tell her so?" broke in his wife, who seemed to be well posted in the matter.

"There are things which one cannot say," answered her husband.

"To whom cannot one say them?"

"To whom? The Church, like the State, my friend, are Divine ideas, but being reduced to reality by weak men, are only imperfectly realised. Therefore one cannot confess before ordinary mortals that these arrangements are imperfect, for then they would begin to doubt their Divine origin."

"But if one, seeing their imperfection, should doubt of their Divine origin, and it should be shown, on examination, that they have no Divine origin?"

"I believe, by all the saints, that the devil of doubt reigns in the air of this time. Do you not know that the first questioner plunged mankind into damnation? Certainly it was not without reason that the Papal Legate in the recent Church Assembly called our land corrupted."

His wife looked at him as if she wanted to see how far he was in earnest, whereon her husband answered with a smile, which showed that he was jesting.

"You must not joke like that," said his wife. "I can so easily believe what you say. Besides, I never know when you are serious or making fun. You believe partly what you say, but partly not. You are so wavering, as though you yourself had been possessed by those spirits in the air of which you spoke."

In order not to proceed further in discussing a question which he preferred to leave untouched, the priest proposed to make a boat excursion to a pleasant spot which had the advantage of some leafy trees, and eat their midday meal there.

Presently he was plying his oars and the green punt shot over the smooth surface of the water, while the children tried to pull up the old reeds of the previous year, through whose dry leaves the spring wind whispered of resurrection from the winter's sleep. The priest had taken off his long coat and put on his jerkin, which he called his "old man." He pulled the oars strongly, like a practised rower, the whole half-mile to the birch-planted height, which lay like an island in the stony waste around. While his wife prepared the meal, he ran about with the children and plucked anemones and primroses. He taught them to shoot with bow and arrow, and cut willow-whistles for them. He climbed the trees, rolled on the grass like a boy, and let himself be driven like a horse with a bit in his mouth by the loudly laughing children. He grew ever more boisterous, and when the boys took the long coat which he had hung on a birch tree as a mark to shoot at, he began

to laugh till he was purple in the face. But his wife looked carefully round on all sides to see whether anyone was watching them. "Ah! let me be at any rate a man in God's free world of nature," he said. And she had no objection to make.

The meal was laid on the grass, and the priest was so hungry that he forgot to say grace, which drew a remark from the children.

"Father does not say grace at table," they said.

"I see no table," he answered, and stuck his thumb in the butter. This delighted the children immensely.

"Keep your feet still under the table, Peter! Don't lay your legs on the table, Nils," he said, and the little ones laughed till they nearly choked. Never had they been so jolly; never had they seen their father so cheerful, and he had constantly to repeat his jests, which they heard at each repetition with the same delight.

But evening was coming on and they had to think of their return home. They packed up the things and got into the boat. They were still cheerful for a while, but soon the laughter grew silent and the children went to sleep on their mother's lap. The father sat quiet and serious, as one is after laughing much, and the nearer they approached the house the more silent he became. He tried at intervals to say something cheerful, but it sounded quite melancholy. The sun threw slanting rays over the huge fields; the wind had fallen; there reigned a depressing silence and deep stillness in all nature, only broken now and then by the lowing of cattle or the passionate crying of the cuckoo.

"Cuckoo in the north brings sorrow forth," said the priest, as though he would thereby give a long-sought expression to his melancholy.

"That is only true of the first time one hears it," said his wife, comforting him.

The roof of the cattle-shed was now visible, and behind it stood the church tower. They moored the punt by the bridge and the father took the two sleeping children and carried them into the house. Then he kissed his wife and thanked her for the pleasant day; he would now go to church, he said, and read vespers.

He took his book and went. When he came on the road the Angelus was ringing. He hastened his steps. From a good distance he saw people moving in the churchyard. Something unusual must be going on, as no one besides the sacristan generally attended vespers. He thought that someone had perhaps seen him on the island, and heard his conversation with his wife. He felt seriously anxious when he approached the church door, for there he perceived two horses with gorgeous trappings and an

archdeacon with his retinue from Upsala, where the Archbishop lived. The archdeacon seemed to have been waiting, for he went immediately towards the priest and said that he wished to make a communication to him when vespers were over. Never had the priest read the evening service so fervently, and with deep anxiety he invoked the protection of all the saints against unknown dangers. He cast a glance now and then at the door, where he saw the archdeacon standing like an executioner waiting for his victim, and when he had said "Amen" he went with heavy steps to receive the blow, for now he was certain that a misfortune was impending.

"I did not wish to visit you in your house," began the Archbishop's messenger, "because my business is of such a nature that it demands a quiet place and the proximity of the holy things which strengthen our hearts. I have a message from the Church council to deliver which will deeply affect the intimacies of your private life."

Here he broke off, for he saw his victim's anxiety, and handed over a parchment which the young priest unrolled and read:

"Dilectis in Christo fratribus (dear brothers in Christ), Episcopus, Sabinensis, apostolicae sedis legatis (the Bishop of Sabina, Legate of the Roman Chair)----"

His eyes flew over the crowded letters, till they stopped all at once at a line which seemed to be written in fire, for the young man's features became as pale as ashes.

The archdeacon seemed to feel sympathy with him and said: "It appears that the demands of the Church are severe: before the close of the year the marriages of all priests are to be dissolved, for a true servant of the Lord cannot live united to a wife without defiling the holy things which he handles, and his heart cannot be divided between Christ and a sinful descendant of the first woman."

"What God hath joined, that shall not man put asunder," answered the priest as soon as he came to himself.

"That is only true for ordinary people; but when the higher aims of the Church of Christ demand it, then what would otherwise be wrong becomes lawful. And mark well the distinction--'Man shall not put asunder.' The saying, therefore, simply refers to man acting as the divider; but here God acts through His servant, and sunders what God has united, therefore it does not apply here."

"But God has ordained marriage Himself," objected the broken man.

"Just what I say, and therefore He has a right to dissolve it."

"But the Lord does not desire this sacrifice from his weak servant."

"The Lord commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son."

"But our hearts will break."

"Just so; hearts ought to break--that makes them more ardent in piety."

"I That can never be the wish of a loving God."

"The 'loving' God caused His own Son to be slain on the Cross. The world is no pleasure-garden, but merely vain and transient, and you may comfort yourself with the thought that the Decretals----"

"No, for God's sake, don't talk to me of Decretals! Archdeacon, in heaven's name give me a spark of hope; dip the tip of your finger in water and quench this fire of despair which you have kindled. Say that it is not possible; try to believe that it was only a proposal which was not adopted."

The archdeacon pointed to his seal and said, "Presentibus consulentibus et consentientibus (it is already decided and confirmed). And as regards the Decretals, my young friend, there are in them such treasures of wisdom that they may well serve to clear up a clouded mind, and if I want to give a good friend a piece of good advice, I say, 'Read the Decretals; read them early and late, and you will find that they make you feel calm and happy.'"

The unhappy priest thought of the stones which he had given on the morning of the same day to the despairing woman, and bowed his head to the blow.

"Therefore," concluded the archdeacon, "enjoy the short time left; the summer wind has blown, the flowers have sprung up in the field, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land. On St Sylvester's Day _ultimo mensis Decembris_ I come here again, and then must your house be swept and garnished, as though Christ the Lord was about to enter, under penalty of excommunication. Till then you can study the decree more closely. Farewell, and forget not to read the Decretals."

He mounted his white horse and rode away in order to reach the next parish before night and to spread grief and misery there, like the rider in the Apocalypse.

Dominus Peder in Rasbo was crushed. He did not venture to go home at once but rushed into the church, where he fell down by the altar. The doors of the gilded altar-triptych stood open, and the Saviour's progress to Calvary was illumined by the red rays of the evening sun. The priest was at this moment not the justiciary of a minatory and

threatening Lord, but he lay like one of the chastised flock and prayed for mercy. He looked up to the image of Christ but found no sympathy there. The Saviour took His cup from the hand that offered it and emptied it to the dregs; He carried His cross on His mangled back up the steep hill where He was to be crucified, but over the Crucified heaven opened. There was then something over and beyond all these sorrows. The priest began to examine into the reasons of these great human sacrifices which were about to take place all over the country. The Church had seen how men began to doubt in the priest's right to be judge and executioner, for they had found their judges full of human weaknesses. Now the priests must show that for Christ's sake they could tear their hearts out of their breasts and lay them on the altar.

"But," continued his rebellious reason, "Christianity has done away with human sacrifices." He went on thinking, and the idea occurred to him that perhaps there was something underlying the old heathen sacrifices. Abraham was a heathen, for he did not know Christ, and he was ready to offer his son at God's command. Christ was sacrificed; all holy martyrs are sacrificed--why should he be spared? There was no reason why he should, and he had to acknowledge that if people were to continue to believe in his preaching they could also demand that, he should sacrifice his dearest himself, for he and his wife were one. He had to acknowledge this, and he felt a peculiar new enjoyment in the thought of the terrible sufferings which awaited him. Pride also came to his support and pointed to the martyr's crown which would elevate him above this congregation, on whom he was accustomed to look down from the high altar, but who had begun to raise their heads and defiantly threatened to storm this lofty position.

Strengthened and elevated by this thought, he rose and passed within the altar-rails. He was, in his own eyes, no more the crushed sinner, but the righteous man who deserved to stand by Christ's side for he had suffered as much as He. He looked proudly down on the praying-stools which in the twilight resembled penitents kneeling, and he hurled the denunciations of a prophet on their heads because they would not believe in his preaching. He tore his coat open and showed them his bleeding breast in which an empty gap showed that he had given God his heart. He bade those of little faith to put their hands in his side and let themselves be carried over by him. He felt himself grow during his suffering, and his over-excited imagination transported him into an ecstasy, so that the operations of thought seemed momentarily suspended and he believed that he was one with Christ. Further than that he could not go, and he collapsed like a sail which has been split by the wind, when the sexton came in to close the church.

On the way home he felt unhappy because his ecstasy was over, and he would have gladly returned to the church had not an indefinite something, which expressed itself as a faint sense of duty, summoned him home. The nearer he approached the more his religious emotions

cooled, and the smaller therefore he felt himself. But when he entered the door, his wife received him with open arms, asking him uneasily why he had remained out so long; and when he felt the friendly glow of his hearth, and saw the children peacefully asleep with rosy cheeks, he realised the preciousness of what he had now to surrender. He felt all his young blood well up in his opened heart, and was conscious of the reawakening of the omnipotent force of first love which can bear everything. He swore never to leave the beloved of his heart, and the married pair felt themselves young again. They sat together till midnight talking of the future and how to escape the danger which threatened them.

* * * * *

The summer passed for the happy pair like a beautiful dream, during which they forgot the wakening which awaited them. Meanwhile the papal decree had become known to the congregation, who heard of it with a sort of malicious satisfaction--partly because they did not grudge their spiritual superiors a little purgatorial fire, and partly because they hoped to get their priests more cheaply when they had to live as celibates. Moreover, there were in the congregation a number of pious people who received whatever came from Bishop and Pope as though it came from heaven. They discussed the question thoroughly and adhered to the view that a priest's marriage was sinful. These pious people, who had expected to see the parsonage purified immediately after the promulgation of the decree, began to murmur when they saw that their pastor gave no signs whatever of intending to obey it. The murmuring grew in strength when the church-tower happened to be struck by lightning. This was followed by a failure in the harvest. The voices of complaint became louder and the pious party sent a deputation to the parsonage to declare that they did not intend to receive the sacrament at the hands of a priest who lived in sin. They demanded that he should separate from his wife, because any more children which might be born would be illegitimate, and they threatened to purify the parsonage with fire if it were not pure by the end of the year.

For a long time after that the pair were left in peace, but a marked change began to be observable in the priest. He went oftener into the church than he needed to, and remained there till late in the evening. He was reserved and cold towards his wife, and seemed as though he were nervous to meet her. He would take his children for hours on his lap and caress them without saying a word.

At Martinmas, in November, the archdeacon from the cathedral city came on a visit and had a long talk with the priest. That night the latter slept in the attic and continued to sleep there. His wife said nothing, but saw the course of events without the prospect of being able to alter anything. Her pride forbade her to make any advance, and as her husband began to take his meals alone, they met seldom. He was as pale

as ashes, and his eyes were sunken in his head; he never ate in the evening, and slept on the bare ground under a sealskin rug.

Then came Christmas-time. Two days before Christmas the priest came into the house and sat by the oven. His wife was mending the children's clothes. For some time there was a dreadful silence; at last the man said: "The children must have something for Christmas; who will go to the town?"

"I will," answered his wife, "but I take the children with me. Do you agree?"

"I have prayed the Lord that this cup might pass from me, but He has not willed it, and I have answered, 'Let not my will but Thine be done!'"

"Are you sure that you know the Lord's will?" said his wife submissively.

"As sure as my soul lives!"

"I will go to-morrow to my father and mother, who are expecting me," said his wife in a sad but firm voice.

The priest stood up and went out hastily, as though he had heard his death-sentence. The evening sky was sparkling and cold, the stars glimmered in the blue-grey depths, and the boundless expanse of the snow-covered plain lay before the despairing wanderer, whose way seemed to point towards the lowest stars of the sky, which seemed as though they had risen out of the white earth. He wandered and wandered on and on; he felt like a tethered horse which runs but is pulled back by the rope whenever it thinks itself free. He passed by houses brightly lit up, and saw how people scoured and swept and baked and cooked in preparation for the approaching Christmas. Thoughts of his own approaching Christmas awoke in him. He imagined his house unheated, unlighted, without her, without the children. His feet were burning but his body felt freezing. He went on and on without knowing whither.

At last he stood before a house. The shutters were fastened, but a ray of light shone out and threw a yellow gleam upon the snow. He went nearer and put his eye to the chink. He saw into a room in which the seats and tables were covered with clothes--little children's shirts, stockings and coats. A large box stood open; on the cover of it hung a white dress whose graceful shape attracted his attention; it evidently belonged to a young woman, and on one shoulder was fastened a green garland. Was it a shroud or a bridal dress? He wondered with himself why corpses and brides were dressed in the same way. He saw a shadow thrown upon the wall--sometimes it was so large that it was broken by the ceiling and vanished in it; sometimes it crept down to the floor.

At last it remained stationary on the upper part of the white dress. A small head wearing a cap was thrown into sharp relief against the bright background. This forehead, this nose, this mouth was familiar to him. Where was he? The shadow sank into the box, and into the light there came a face which could belong to no living person, so pale and unspeakably suffering did it appear. It looked him in the eyes so that they smarted, and he felt the tears roll down his cheeks and melt the snow on the window-ledge. The eyes of the face were so soft and pleading that he thought he saw St Katherine on the wheel, praying the Emperor Decius for mercy. Yes, that was she, and he was the Emperor. Should he grant her mercy? No; "give that which is Cæsar's unto Cæsar," says the Scripture. No mercy! But he could not endure these looks, if he was to continue to be strong; therefore he must go.

He now went into the garden, where the snow lay deep on his straw-covered flower-beds so that they looked like little children's graves. Who lay in them? His children. His happy, rosy-cheeked children, whom God had commanded him to sacrifice, as Abraham sacrificed Isaac. But Abraham escaped with only a fright. That must be a God of hell, Who could be so inhuman. It must be a bad God Who preached love to men but Himself behaved like an executioner. He would go at once and seek Him; seek Him in His own house, speak with Him, and demand an explanation.

He left the garden and waded through the snow-drifts till he reached a little fir tree by the wood-shed, and laid hold of it. That was a Christmas-tree like one the children would have danced round had they lived. Now he remembered that he wanted to seek the God Who had taken his children in order to bring him to account. The church was not far, but when he came to it it was closed. Then he became frantic. He scraped away the snow till he got hold of a large stone, and with that he began to hammer the door till the echoes from the church sounded like thunder, while he shouted loudly: "Come out, Moloch, child-devourer! I will split up your stomach! Come out, St Katharine and all saints and devils! You must fight with the Emperor Decius in Rasbo! Oho! You come from behind, legions of the abyss!" He turned round to the churchyard, and with the strength of a madman he broke down a young lime tree, and using it as a weapon he attacked the crowd of little grave-crosses which with out-stretched arms seemed to be marching against him. They did not flinch, and he mowed them down like Death with his scythe, not stopping till he had laid every one flat and the ground was covered with splinters of wood.

But his strength was not yet exhausted. Now he would plunder the corpses of his enemies and collect the dead and wounded. Load after load he carried to the wall of the church and piled them under a window. When he had finished he climbed on the pile, broke a pane of glass, and got into the church. The inside was quite lit up by the northern lights which had hitherto been hidden from him by the

high roof of the church. He made a new raid on the threatening prayer-stools, which he battered into a heap of fragments. His eyes now rested on the high altar, where throned above the pictures of the Passion a figure sat on a cloud with the lightnings of the law in his hand. The priest crossed his arms and regarded defiantly the severe figure on the cloud. "Come down!" he shrieked. "Come down! We will wrestle together!" When he saw that his challenge was not accepted, he seized a block of wood and hurled it at his enemy. It crashed on a plaster ornament, which fell down and raised a cloud of dust.

He took another piece of wood and then another and hurled them with the mounting rage of disappointment. The clouds fell piece by piece, while he laughed loudly, the lightnings were torn out of the hand of the figure; at last the heavy piece of carving fell with a terrible crash on the altar and smashed the candlesticks in its fall.

But then the blasphemer was seized with a panic and sprang out of the window.

* * * * *

On the morning of the day before Christmas a parishioner had seen a strange sight by the hedge of the parsonage garden. A sledge came out of the enclosure containing a woman, two children, and a servant, and was driven westwards. At about a quarter of a mile distant it was followed by the priest running and calling out for the sledge to stop. But it had continued to proceed till it vanished round a bend of the high-road. Then the priest had fallen into a snow-drift, shaking his clenched fist against the sky. Later information came to the effect that the priest lay very ill with fever, and that the devil, in anger that he had not overcome the servant of the Lord in the battle waged for the dissolution of his marriage, had raged in the most terrible way in the church. But in order to enter it, and to exercise his power there, he had first broken down all the crosses in the churchyard. All this restored the priest's reputation and even gave him an appearance of sanctity, which especially pleased the pious party who had been the instigators of the purification of the parsonage.

* * * * *

The priest lay ill for three months and could not go out till April. He had become old. His face was full of angles, his eyes had lost their brightness, his mouth was half open, his back was bent. On the south side of the house he had a seat where he could sit in the warmth of the sun, buried in dreams of the past which hardly possessed any reality for him, especially as he had received no news from those whom he had once called his own.

Then the month of May returned with flowers and the song of birds. The

priest went into his garden and saw how it was overgrown with weeds; his precious flowers were killed by the frost because no one had seen to their being covered, and they now lay mouldering like rags upon the earth. It never occurred to him for a moment to break up the soil round the flower-beds or to do anything else of the kind, since he had no one for whom to work and there would be no tending hand to protect the young growths. He stood by the fence and looked out over the landscape. The plain stretched away in the sunlight and the little brook rippled merrily and invited his eyes to follow the little wavelets, which danced by and aroused his longing to follow them southwards, where they met the river. He unmoored his boat, sat in it without touching the rudder, and let it drift with the stream, gliding on thus for about two hours.

Suddenly he was aware of the fresh scent of budding birches and spring flowers. He looked round; the plain had ceased, and he found himself at the beginning of the little birch wood. Memories of the previous year rose in him; bright, phantom-like images hovered above the primroses and anemones. He stepped on shore and went up the hill. Here they had eaten their lunch; here on this branch hung the coat at which the boys had shot with their bows. He saw the hole which he had bored in the birch tree to draw off the sap, which the little ones had drunk. The willow still bore scars from the knife with which he had cut arrows. He found an arrow in the grass; how they had hunted for it--the best he had ever cut, which flew above the top of the highest birch tree! He hunted in the grass and bushes like a pointer; he upturned the stones, bent back the branches, raised up the previous year's grass, scratched away the leaves. What he sought for exactly he did not know, but he wished to find something which might remind him of her. Finally he stood by a hawthorn bush; there hung a small fragment of a piece of red woollen cloth on a thorn. It was set in motion by the wind and fluttered like a pretty butterfly between the white hawthorn blossoms--a butterfly pierced by a needle. Then there came a second gust of wind and turned it round, so that it looked like a bleeding heart--a heart that was torn from a victim's breast and hung on a tree. He took it down from the bush, held it to his mouth, breathed on it, kissed it, and hid it in his hand. Here she had played "soldiers" with the children, and they had trodden on her dress.

He lay down on the grass and wept; he called her name and the children's. So long did he weep that he fell asleep from exhaustion.

When he awoke he remained lying as he was for a time and looked with half-closed eyes over the grass meadow. His eyes fell on a large willow bush whose yellow tassels hung like golden ears of corn in the sunshine. His tears had calmed him and produced a certain peace in his mind; sorrow and joy had ceased, and his soul felt in equipoise. The reason that his eye rested on the willow bush was that it was directly in his line of sight. A gentle wind swayed the branches lightly, and

their movement seemed to soothe his tear-reddened eyes. Suddenly the branches of the bush stopped swaying with a jerk; there was a rustling, and a hand bent the boughs to one side; a sunlit female figure appeared framed in the gold of the willow tassels and the green of the tender leafage.

He still lay a while watching the beautiful sight, as when one looks at a picture. Then his eyes met hers, which looked out of the bush like two stars; they kindled, as it were, flame in his expiring spirit. His body rose from the earth and his feet carried him forward; he stretched out his arms, and the next moment he felt a small warm creature nestle on his stony bosom, which was again filled with the breath of life, and a long kiss melted the ice which had so long held his spirit imprisoned.

* * * *

Eight days later the archdeacon came on a visit to the parsonage at Rasbo. He found the priest happy and contented. The archdeacon had a commission which made him somewhat embarrassed, and he found he had to express himself suitably. Rumours, he said, had been heard in the congregation which had reached to the Archbishop's chair. One should not certainly believe all reports, but the mere fact of a report arising was itself half a proof. The priest, to speak plainly, was said to be having assignations with a woman. The Archbishop was fully aware of the storm which the Papal Bull regarding priests' marriages had occasioned. The Holy Father himself had recognised the cruelty involved in the new law, and had therefore thought it advisable through a special "licentia occulta" (a secret permission) to make the lives of the clergy less difficult. Woman, it must be admitted, was the presiding genius of home life.

Here the current of his eloquence stopped, and in a low, scarcely audible voice the messenger of Christ whispered the secret sanction.

The priest answered, "Then the Church does not allow a priest to have a wife, but only a mistress?"

"Don't use such strong words! We call it a 'housekeeper.'"

"Well then," said the priest, "if I take my wife as a housekeeper, the Church has nothing against it?"

"No! No! Take any other, but not her. The aims of the Church! Remember!"

"The higher aims of the Church," you said. "So it was to annul the right of inheritance and to get possession of land that the Church insisted on divorce, not in order to check sin! You consider therefore the unlawful seizure of other people's property as 'higher aims.' Very well then! I will have nothing to do with the Church. Excommunicate me,

and I will consider it an honour to be excluded from the fellowship of the noble Church. Depose me from my office, and I will be so far away before you have been able to write your proclamation that you will never be able to find a trace of me. Greet the Holy Father from me, archdeacon, and tell him that I do not accept his dirty offer. Greet him and say that the gods whom our forefathers worshipped above the clouds and in the sun were greater and much purer than these Roman and Semitic cattle-drivers whom you have foisted upon us. Greet him and say that you have met a man who will devote his whole future life to converting Christians to heathenism, and that a day will come when the new heathen will undertake crusades against the vicegerent of Christ and His followers who wish to introduce the custom of sacrificing men alive, whereas the heathen contented themselves with killing them. And now, archdeacon, take your Decretals and go away before I flog you soundly. You have nearly killed two people here with your invisible 'higher aims,' and the whole land calls down a curse on you. Go with my curse; break your legs on the high-road; die in a ditch; may the lightning strike you and robbers plunder you; may the ghosts of your dead relations haunt you; may incendiaries set your house on fire--for I excommunicate you from the society of all honourable men, as I excommunicate myself from the Holy Church! Get out!"

The archdeacon did not remain long in the parsonage; nor did the priest, for his wife and children were waiting for him by the hill planted with birch trees on the way to the wood on the border of Vestmanland, where he was going to plant a settlement.

MR. AND MRS. DOVE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Garden Party*, by Katherine Mansfield

Of course he knew--no man better--that he hadn't a ghost of a chance, he hadn't an earthly. The very idea of such a thing was preposterous. So preposterous that he'd perfectly understand it if her father--well, whatever her father chose to do he'd perfectly understand. In fact, nothing short of desperation, nothing short of the fact that this was positively his last day in England for God knows how long, would have screwed him up to it. And even now... He chose a tie out of the chest of drawers, a blue and cream check tie, and sat on the side of his bed. Supposing she replied, "What impertinence!" would he be surprised? Not in the least, he decided, turning up his soft collar and turning it down over the tie. He expected her to say something like that. He didn't see, if he looked at the affair dead soberly, what else she could say.

Here he was! And nervously he tied a bow in front of the mirror, jammed his hair down with both hands, pulled out the flaps of his jacket

pockets. Making between 500 and 600 pounds a year on a fruit farm in--of all places--Rhodesia. No capital. Not a penny coming to him. No chance of his income increasing for at least four years. As for looks and all that sort of thing, he was completely out of the running. He couldn't even boast of top-hole health, for the East Africa business had knocked him out so thoroughly that he'd had to take six months' leave. He was still fearfully pale--worse even than usual this afternoon, he thought, bending forward and peering into the mirror. Good heavens! What had happened? His hair looked almost bright green. Dash it all, he hadn't green hair at all events. That was a bit too steep. And then the green light trembled in the glass; it was the shadow from the tree outside. Reggie turned away, took out his cigarette case, but remembering how the mater hated him to smoke in his bedroom, put it back again and drifted over to the chest of drawers. No, he was dashed if he could think of one blessed thing in his favour, while she... Ah!... He stopped dead, folded his arms, and leaned hard against the chest of drawers.

And in spite of her position, her father's wealth, the fact that she was an only child and far and away the most popular girl in the neighbourhood; in spite of her beauty and her cleverness--cleverness!--it was a great deal more than that, there was really nothing she couldn't do; he fully believed, had it been necessary, she would have been a genius at anything--in spite of the fact that her parents adored her, and she them, and they'd as soon let her go all that way as... In spite of every single thing you could think of, so terrific was his love that he couldn't help hoping. Well, was it hope? Or was this queer, timid longing to have the chance of looking after her, of making it his job to see that she had everything she wanted, and that nothing came near her that wasn't perfect--just love? How he loved her! He squeezed hard against the chest of drawers and murmured to it, "I love her, I love her!" And just for the moment he was with her on the way to Umtali. It was night. She sat in a corner asleep. Her soft chin was tucked into her soft collar, her gold-brown lashes lay on her cheeks. He doted on her delicate little nose, her perfect lips, her ear like a baby's, and the gold-brown curl that half covered it. They were passing through the jungle. It was warm and dark and far away. Then she woke up and said, "Have I been asleep?" and he answered, "Yes. Are you all right? Here, let me--" And he leaned forward to... He bent over her. This was such bliss that he could dream no further. But it gave him the courage to bound downstairs, to snatch his straw hat from the hall, and to say as he closed the front door, "Well, I can only try my luck, that's all."

But his luck gave him a nasty jar, to say the least, almost immediately. Promenading up and down the garden path with Chinny and Biddy, the ancient Pokes, was the mater. Of course Reginald was fond of the mater and all that. She--she meant well, she had no end of grit, and so on. But there was no denying it, she was rather a grim parent. And there had been moments, many of them, in Reggie's life, before Uncle Alick died

and left him the fruit farm, when he was convinced that to be a widow's only son was about the worst punishment a chap could have. And what made it rougher than ever was that she was positively all that he had. She wasn't only a combined parent, as it were, but she had quarrelled with all her own and the governor's relations before Reggie had won his first trouser pockets. So that whenever Reggie was homesick out there, sitting on his dark veranda by starlight, while the gramophone cried, "Dear, what is Life but Love?" his only vision was of the mater, tall and stout, rustling down the garden path, with Chinny and Biddy at her heels...

The mater, with her scissors outspread to snap the head of a dead something or other, stopped at the sight of Reggie.

"You are not going out, Reginald?" she asked, seeing that he was.

"I'll be back for tea, mater," said Reggie weakly, plunging his hands into his jacket pockets.

Snip. Off came a head. Reggie almost jumped.

"I should have thought you could have spared your mother your last afternoon," said she.

Silence. The Pokes stared. They understood every word of the mater's. Biddy lay down with her tongue poked out; she was so fat and glossy she looked like a lump of half-melted toffee. But Chinny's porcelain eyes gloomed at Reginald, and he sniffed faintly, as though the whole world were one unpleasant smell. Snip, went the scissors again. Poor little beggars; they were getting it!

"And where are you going, if your mother may ask?" asked the mater.

It was over at last, but Reggie did not slow down until he was out of sight of the house and half-way to Colonel Proctor's. Then only he noticed what a top-hole afternoon it was. It had been raining all the morning, late summer rain, warm, heavy, quick, and now the sky was clear, except for a long tail of little clouds, like duckings, sailing over the forest. There was just enough wind to shake the last drops off the trees; one warm star splashed on his hand. Ping!--another drummed on his hat. The empty road gleamed, the hedges smelled of briar, and how big and bright the hollyhocks glowed in the cottage gardens. And here was Colonel Proctor's--here it was already. His hand was on the gate, his elbow jogged the syringa bushes, and petals and pollen scattered over his coat sleeve. But wait a bit. This was too quick altogether. He'd meant to think the whole thing out again. Here, steady. But he was walking up the path, with the huge rose bushes on either side. It can't be done like this. But his hand had grasped the bell, given it a pull, and started it pealing wildly, as if he'd come to say the house was on

fire. The housemaid must have been in the hall, too, for the front door flashed open, and Reggie was shut in the empty drawing-room before that confounded bell had stopped ringing. Strangely enough, when it did, the big room, shadowy, with some one's parasol lying on top of the grand piano, bucked him up--or rather, excited him. It was so quiet, and yet in one moment the door would open, and his fate be decided. The feeling was not unlike that of being at the dentist's; he was almost reckless. But at the same time, to his immense surprise, Reggie heard himself saying, "Lord, Thou knowest, Thou hast not done much for me..." That pulled him up; that made him realize again how dead serious it was. Too late. The door handle turned. Anne came in, crossed the shadowy space between them, gave him her hand, and said, in her small, soft voice, "I'm so sorry, father is out. And mother is having a day in town, hat-hunting. There's only me to entertain you, Reggie."

Reggie gasped, pressed his own hat to his jacket buttons, and stammered out, "As a matter of fact, I've only come... to say good-bye."

"Oh!" cried Anne softly--she stepped back from him and her grey eyes danced--"what a very short visit!"

Then, watching him, her chin tilted, she laughed outright, a long, soft peal, and walked away from him over to the piano, and leaned against it, playing with the tassel of the parasol.

"I'm so sorry," she said, "to be laughing like this. I don't know why I do. It's just a bad ha--habit." And suddenly she stamped her grey shoe, and took a pocket-handkerchief out of her white woolly jacket. "I really must conquer it, it's too absurd," said she.

"Good heavens, Anne," cried Reggie, "I love to hear you laughing! I can't imagine anything more--"

But the truth was, and they both knew it, she wasn't always laughing; it wasn't really a habit. Only ever since the day they'd met, ever since that very first moment, for some strange reason that Reggie wished to God he understood, Anne had laughed at him. Why? It didn't matter where they were or what they were talking about. They might begin by being as serious as possible, dead serious--at any rate, as far as he was concerned--but then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, Anne would glance at him, and a little quick quiver passed over her face. Her lips parted, her eyes danced, and she began laughing.

Another queer thing about it was, Reggie had an idea she didn't herself know why she laughed. He had seen her turn away, frown, suck in her cheeks, press her hands together. But it was no use. The long, soft peal sounded, even while she cried, "I don't know why I'm laughing." It was a mystery...

Now she tucked the handkerchief away.

“Do sit down,” said she. “And smoke, won't you? There are cigarettes in that little box beside you. I'll have one too.” He lighted a match for her, and as she bent forward he saw the tiny flame glow in the pearl ring she wore. “It is to-morrow that you're going, isn't it?” said Anne.

“Yes, to-morrow as ever was,” said Reggie, and he blew a little fan of smoke. Why on earth was he so nervous? Nervous wasn't the word for it.

“It's--it's frightfully hard to believe,” he added.

“Yes--isn't it?” said Anne softly, and she leaned forward and rolled the point of her cigarette round the green ash-tray. How beautiful she looked like that!--simply beautiful--and she was so small in that immense chair. Reginald's heart swelled with tenderness, but it was her voice, her soft voice, that made him tremble. “I feel you've been here for years,” she said.

Reginald took a deep breath of his cigarette. “It's ghastly, this idea of going back,” he said.

“Coo-roo-coo-coo-coo,” sounded from the quiet.

“But you're fond of being out there, aren't you?” said Anne. She hooked her finger through her pearl necklace. “Father was saying only the other night how lucky he thought you were to have a life of your own.” And she looked up at him. Reginald's smile was rather wan. “I don't feel fearfully lucky,” he said lightly.

“Roo-coo-coo-coo,” came again. And Anne murmured, “You mean it's lonely.”

“Oh, it isn't the loneliness I care about,” said Reginald, and he stumped his cigarette savagely on the green ash-tray. “I could stand any amount of it, used to like it even. It's the idea of--” Suddenly, to his horror, he felt himself blushing.

“Roo-coo-coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo-coo!”

Anne jumped up. “Come and say good-bye to my doves,” she said. “They've been moved to the side veranda. You do like doves, don't you, Reggie?”

“Awfully,” said Reggie, so fervently that as he opened the French window for her and stood to one side, Anne ran forward and laughed at the doves instead.

To and fro, to and fro over the fine red sand on the floor of the dove house, walked the two doves. One was always in front of the other. One

ran forward, uttering a little cry, and the other followed, solemnly bowing and bowing. "You see," explained Anne, "the one in front, she's Mrs. Dove. She looks at Mr. Dove and gives that little laugh and runs forward, and he follows her, bowing and bowing. And that makes her laugh again. Away she runs, and after her," cried Anne, and she sat back on her heels, "comes poor Mr. Dove, bowing and bowing... and that's their whole life. They never do anything else, you know." She got up and took some yellow grains out of a bag on the roof of the dove house. "When you think of them, out in Rhodesia, Reggie, you can be sure that is what they will be doing... "

Reggie gave no sign of having seen the doves or of having heard a word. For the moment he was conscious only of the immense effort it took to tear his secret out of himself and offer it to Anne. "Anne, do you think you could ever care for me?" It was done. It was over. And in the little pause that followed Reginald saw the garden open to the light, the blue quivering sky, the flutter of leaves on the veranda poles, and Anne turning over the grains of maize on her palm with one finger. Then slowly she shut her hand, and the new world faded as she murmured slowly, "No, never in that way." But he had scarcely time to feel anything before she walked quickly away, and he followed her down the steps, along the garden path, under the pink rose arches, across the lawn. There, with the gay herbaceous border behind her, Anne faced Reginald. "It isn't that I'm not awfully fond of you," she said. "I am. But"--her eyes widened--"not in the way"--a quiver passed over her face--"one ought to be fond of--" Her lips parted, and she couldn't stop herself. She began laughing. "There, you see, you see," she cried, "it's your check t-tie. Even at this moment, when one would think one really would be solemn, your tie reminds me fearfully of the bow-tie that cats wear in pictures! Oh, please forgive me for being so horrid, please!"

Reggie caught hold of her little warm hand. "There's no question of forgiving you," he said quickly. "How could there be? And I do believe I know why I make you laugh. It's because you're so far above me in every way that I am somehow ridiculous. I see that, Anne. But if I were to--"

"No, no." Anne squeezed his hand hard. "It's not that. That's all wrong. I'm not far above you at all. You're much better than I am. You're marvellously unselfish and... and kind and simple. I'm none of those things. You don't know me. I'm the most awful character," said Anne. "Please don't interrupt. And besides, that's not the point. The point is"--she shook her head--"I couldn't possibly marry a man I laughed at. Surely you see that. The man I marry--" breathed Anne softly. She broke off. She drew her hand away, and looking at Reggie she smiled strangely, dreamily. "The man I marry--"

And it seemed to Reggie that a tall, handsome, brilliant stranger stepped in front of him and took his place--the kind of man that Anne and he had seen often at the theatre, walking on to the stage from

nowhere, without a word catching the heroine in his arms, and after one long, tremendous look, carrying her off to anywhere...

Reggie bowed to his vision. "Yes, I see," he said huskily.

"Do you?" said Anne. "Oh, I do hope you do. Because I feel so horrid about it. It's so hard to explain. You know I've never--" She stopped. Reggie looked at her. She was smiling. "Isn't it funny?" she said. "I can say anything to you. I always have been able to from the very beginning."

He tried to smile, to say "I'm glad." She went on. "I've never known any one I like as much as I like you. I've never felt so happy with any one. But I'm sure it's not what people and what books mean when they talk about love. Do you understand? Oh, if you only knew how horrid I feel. But we'd be like... like Mr. and Mrs. Dove."

That did it. That seemed to Reginald final, and so terribly true that he could hardly bear it. "Don't drive it home," he said, and he turned away from Anne and looked across the lawn. There was the gardener's cottage, with the dark ilex-tree beside it. A wet, blue thumb of transparent smoke hung above the chimney. It didn't look real. How his throat ached! Could he speak? He had a shot. "I must be getting along home," he croaked, and he began walking across the lawn. But Anne ran after him. "No, don't. You can't go yet," she said imploringly. "You can't possibly go away feeling like that." And she stared up at him frowning, biting her lip.

"Oh, that's all right," said Reggie, giving himself a shake. "I'll... I'll--" And he waved his hand as much to say "get over it."

"But this is awful," said Anne. She clasped her hands and stood in front of him. "Surely you do see how fatal it would be for us to marry, don't you?"

"Oh, quite, quite," said Reggie, looking at her with haggard eyes.

"How wrong, how wicked, feeling as I do. I mean, it's all very well for Mr. and Mrs. Dove. But imagine that in real life--imagine it!"

"Oh, absolutely," said Reggie, and he started to walk on. But again Anne stopped him. She tugged at his sleeve, and to his astonishment, this time, instead of laughing, she looked like a little girl who was going to cry.

"Then why, if you understand, are you so un-unhappy?" she wailed. "Why do you mind so fearfully? Why do you look so aw-awful?"

Reggie gulped, and again he waved something away. "I can't help it," he

said, "I've had a blow. If I cut off now, I'll be able to--"

"How can you talk of cutting off now?" said Anne scornfully. She stamped her foot at Reggie; she was crimson. "How can you be so cruel? I can't let you go until I know for certain that you are just as happy as you were before you asked me to marry you. Surely you must see that, it's so simple."

But it did not seem at all simple to Reginald. It seemed impossibly difficult.

"Even if I can't marry you, how can I know that you're all that way away, with only that awful mother to write to, and that you're miserable, and that it's all my fault?"

"It's not your fault. Don't think that. It's just fate." Reggie took her hand off his sleeve and kissed it. "Don't pity me, dear little Anne," he said gently. And this time he nearly ran, under the pink arches, along the garden path.

"Roo-coo-coo-coo! Roo-coo-coo-coo!" sounded from the veranda. "Reggie, Reggie," from the garden.

He stopped, he turned. But when she saw his timid, puzzled look, she gave a little laugh.

"Come back, Mr. Dove," said Anne. And Reginald came slowly across the lawn.

THE EMERALD EYES

by Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer

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For a long time I have desired to write something with this title. Now that the opportunity has come, I have inscribed it in capital letters at the top of the page and have let my pen run at will.

I believe that I have seen eyes like those I have painted in this legend. It may have been in my dreams, but I have seen them. Too true it is that I shall not be able to describe them as they were, luminous, transparent as drops of rain slipping over the leaves of the trees after

a summer shower. At all events, I count upon the imagination of my readers to understand me in what we might call a sketch for a picture which I will paint some day.

I.

“The stag is wounded--he is wounded; no doubt of it. There are traces of his blood on the mountain shrubs, and in trying to leap one of those mastic trees his legs failed him. Our young lord begins where others end. In my forty years as huntsman I have not seen a better shot. But by Saint Saturio, patron of Soria, cut him off at these hollies, urge on the dogs, blow the horns till your lungs are empty, and bury your spurs in the flanks of the horses. Do you not see that he is going toward the fountain of the Poplars, and if he lives to reach it we must give him up for lost?”

The glens of the Moncayo flung from echo to echo the braying of the horns and barking of the unleashed pack of hounds; the shouts of the pages resounded with new vigor, while the confused throng of men, dogs and horses rushed toward the point which Iñigo, the head huntsman of the Marquises of Almenar, indicated as the one most favorable for intercepting the quarry.

But all was of no avail. When the fleetest of the greyhounds reached the hollies, panting, its jaws covered with foam, already the deer, swift as an arrow, had cleared them at a single bound, disappearing among the thickets of a narrow path which led to the fountain.

“Draw rein! draw rein, every man!” then cried Iñigo. “It was the will of God that he should escape.”

And the troop halted, the horns fell silent and the hounds, at the call of the hunters, abandoned, snarling, the trail.

At that moment, the lord of the festival, Fernando de Argensola, the heir of Almenar, came up with the company.

“What are you doing?” he exclaimed, addressing his huntsman, astonishment depicted on his features, anger burning in his eyes. “What are you doing, idiot? Do you see that the creature is wounded, that it is the first to fall by my hand, and yet you abandon the pursuit and let it give you the slip to die in the depths of the forest? Do you think perchance that I have come to kill deer for the banquets of wolves?”

“_Señor_,” murmured Iñigo between his teeth, “it is impossible to pass this point.”

“Impossible! And why?”

“Because this path,” continued the huntsman, “leads to the fountain of the Poplars, the fountain of the Poplars in whose waters dwells an evil spirit. He who dares trouble its flow pays dear for his rashness. Already the deer will have reached its borders; how will you take it without drawing on your head some fearful calamity? We hunters are kings of the Moncayo, but kings that pay a tribute. A quarry which takes refuge at this mysterious fountain is a quarry lost.”

“Lost! Sooner will I lose the seigniorship of my fathers, sooner will I lose my soul into the hands of Satan than permit this stag to escape me, the only one my spear has wounded, the first fruits of my hunting. Do you see him? Do you see him? He can still at intervals be made out from here. His legs falter, his speed slackens; let me go, let me go! Drop this bridle or I roll you in the dust! Who knows if I will not run him down before he reaches the fountain? And if he should reach it, to the devil with it, its untroubled waters and its inhabitants! On, Lightning! on, my steed! If you overtake him, I will have the diamonds of my coronet set in a headstall all of gold for you.”

Horse and rider departed like a hurricane.

Iñigo followed them with his eyes till they disappeared in the brush. Then he looked about him: all like himself remained motionless, in consternation.

The huntsman exclaimed at last:

“_Señores_, you are my witnesses. I exposed myself to death under his horse’s hoofs to hold him back. I have fulfilled my duty. Against the devil heroism does not avail. To this point comes the huntsman with his crossbow; beyond this, it is for the chaplain with his holy water to attempt to pass.”

II.

“You are pale; you go about sad and gloomy. What afflicts you? From the day, which I shall ever hold in hate, on which you went to the fountain of the Poplars in chase of the wounded deer, I should say an evil sorceress had bewitched you with her enchantments.

“You do not go to the mountains now preceded by the clamorous pack of hounds, nor does the blare of your horns awake the echoes. Alone with these brooding fancies which beset you, every morning you take your crossbow only to plunge into the thickets and remain there until the sun goes down. And when night darkens and you return to the castle, white and weary, in vain I seek in the game-bag the spoils of the chase. What detains you so long far from those who love you most?”

While Iñigo was speaking, Fernando, absorbed in his thoughts, mechanically cut splinters from the ebony bench with his hunting knife.

After a long silence, which was interrupted only by the click of the blade as it slipped over the polished wood, the young man, addressing his servant as if he had not heard a single word, exclaimed:

“Iñigo, you who are an old man, you who know all the haunts of the Moncayo, who have lived on its slopes pursuing wild beasts and in your wandering hunting trips have more than once stood on its summit, tell me, have you ever by chance met a woman who dwells among its rocks?”

“A woman!” exclaimed the huntsman with astonishment, looking closely at him.

“Yes,” said the youth. “It is a strange thing that has happened to me, very strange. I thought I could keep this secret always; but it is no longer possible. It overflows my heart and begins to reveal itself in my face. Therefore I am going to tell it to you. You will help me solve the mystery which enfolds this being who seems to exist only for me, since no one knows her or has seen her, or can give me any account of her.”

The huntsman, without opening his lips, drew forward his stool to place it near the ebony bench of his lord from whom he did not once remove his affrighted eyes. The youth, after arranging his thoughts, continued thus:

“From the day on which, notwithstanding your gloomy predictions, I went to the fountain of the Poplars, and crossing its waters recovered the stag which your superstition would have let escape, my soul has been filled with a desire for solitude.

“You do not know that place. See, the fountain springs from a hidden source in the cavity of a rock, and falls in trickling drops through the green, floating leaves of the plants that grow on the border of its cradle. These drops, which on falling glisten like points of gold and sound like the notes of a musical instrument, unite on the turf and murmuring, murmuring with a sound like that of bees humming about the flowers, glide on through the gravel, and form a rill and contend with the obstacles in their way, and gather volume and leap and flee and run, sometimes with a laugh, sometimes with sighs, until they fall into a lake. Into the lake they fall with an indescribable sound. Laments, words, names, songs, I know not what I have heard in that sound when I have sat, alone and fevered, upon the huge rock at whose feet the waters of that mysterious fountain leap to bury themselves in a deep pool whose still surface is scarcely rippled by the evening wind.

“Everything there is grand. Solitude with its thousand vague murmurs

dwells in those places and transports the mind with a profound melancholy. In the silvered leaves of the poplars, in the hollows of the rocks, in the waves of the water it seems that the invisible spirits of nature talk with us, that they recognize a brother in the immortal soul of man.

“When at break of dawn you would see me take my crossbow and go toward the mountain, it was never to lose myself among the thickets in pursuit of game. No, I went to sit on the rim of the fountain, to seek in its waves--I know not what--an absurdity! The day I leaped over it on my Lightning, I believed I saw glittering in its depths a marvel--truly a marvel--the eyes of a woman!

“Perhaps it may have been a fugitive ray of sunshine that wound, serpent like, through the foam; perhaps one of those flowers which float among the weeds of its bosom, flowers whose calyxes seem to be emeralds--I do not know. I thought I saw a gaze which fixed itself on mine, a look which kindled in my breast a desire absurd, impossible of realization, that of meeting a person with eyes like those.

“In my search, I went to that place day after day.

“At last, one afternoon--I thought myself the plaything of a dream--but no, it is the truth; I have spoken with her many times as I am now speaking with you--one afternoon I found, sitting where I had sat, clothed in a robe which reached to the waters and floated on their surface, a woman beautiful beyond all exaggeration. Her hair was like gold; her eyelashes shone like threads of light, and between the lashes flashed the restless eyes that I had seen--yes; for the eyes of that woman were the eyes which I bore stamped upon my mind, eyes of an impossible color, the color----”

“Green!” exclaimed Iñigo, in accents of profound terror, starting with a bound from his seat.

Fernando, in turn, looked at him as if astonished that Iñigo should supply what he was about to say, and asked him with mingled anxiety and joy:

“Do you know her?”

“Oh, no!” said the huntsman. “God save me from knowing her! But my parents, on forbidding me to go toward those places, told me a thousand times that the spirit, goblin, demon or woman, who dwells in those waters, has eyes of that color. I conjure you by that which you love most on earth not to return to the fountain of the Poplars. One day or another her vengeance will overtake you, and you will expiate in death the crime of having stained her waters.”

“By what I love most!” murmured the young man with a sad smile.

“Yes,” continued the elder. “By your parents, by your kindred, by the tears of her whom heaven destines for your wife, by those of a servant who watched beside your cradle.”

“Do you know what I love most in this world? Do you know for what I would give the love of my father, the kisses of her who gave me life, and all the affection which all the women on earth can hold in store? For one look, for only one look of those eyes! How can I leave off seeking them?”

Fernando said these words in such a tone that the tear which trembled on the eyelids of Iñigo fell silently down his cheek, while he exclaimed with a mournful accent: “The will of Heaven be done!”

III.

“Who art thou? What is thy fatherland? Where dost thou dwell? Day after day I come seeking thee, and see neither the palfrey that brings thee hither, nor the servants who bear thy litter. Rend once for all the veil of mystery in which thou dost enfold thyself as in the heart of night. I love thee and, highborn or lowly, I will be thine, thine forever.”

The sun had crossed the crest of the mountain. The shadows were descending its slope with giant strides. The breeze sighed amid the poplars of the fountain. The mist, rising little by little from the surface of the lake, began to envelop the rocks of its margin.

Upon one of these rocks, on one which seemed ready to topple over into the depths of the waters on whose surface was pictured its wavering image, the heir of Almenar, on his knees at the feet of his mysterious beloved, sought in vain to draw from her the secret of her existence.

She was beautiful, beautiful and pallid as an alabaster statue. One of her tresses fell over her shoulders, entangling itself in the folds of her veil like a ray of sunlight passing through clouds; and her eyes, within the circle of her amber-colored lashes, gleamed like emeralds set in fretted gold.

When the youth ceased speaking, her lips moved as for utterance, but only exhaled a sigh, a sigh soft and sorrowful like that of the gentle wave which a dying breeze drives among the rushes.

“Thou answerest not,” exclaimed Fernando, seeing his hope mocked. “Wouldst thou have me credit what they have told me of thee? Oh, no! Speak to me. I long to know if thou lovest me; I long to know if I may love thee, if thou art a woman----”

--“Or a demon. And if I were?”

The youth hesitated a moment; a cold sweat ran through his limbs; the pupils of his eyes dilated, fixing themselves with more intensity upon those of that woman and, fascinated by their phosphoric brilliance, as though demented he exclaimed in a burst of passion:

“If thou wert, I should love thee. I should love thee as I love thee now, as it is my destiny to love thee even beyond this life, if there be any life beyond.”

“Fernando,” said the beautiful being then, in a voice like music: “I love thee even more than thou lovest me; in that I, who am pure spirit, stoop to a mortal. I am not a woman like those that live on earth. I am a woman worthy of thee who art superior to the rest of humankind. I dwell in the depths of these waters, incorporeal like them, fugitive and transparent; I speak with their murmurs and move with their undulations. I do not punish him who dares disturb the fountain where I live; rather I reward him with my love, as a mortal superior to the superstitions of the common herd, as a lover capable of responding to my strange and mysterious embrace.”

While she was speaking, the youth, absorbed in the contemplation of her fantastic beauty, drawn on as by an unknown force, approached nearer and nearer the edge of the rock. The woman of the emerald eyes continued thus:

“Dost thou behold, behold the limpid depths of this lake, behold these plants with large, green leaves which wave in its bosom? They will give us a couch of emeralds and corals and I--I will give thee a bliss unnamable, that bliss which thou hast dreamed of in thine hours of delirium, and which no other can bestow.--Come! the mists of the lake float over our brows like a pavilion of lawn, the waves call us with their incomprehensible voices, the wind sings among the poplars hymns of love; come--come!”

Night began to cast her shadows, the moon shimmered on the surface of the pool, the mist was driven before the rising breeze, the green eyes glittered in the dusk like the will-o'-the-wisps that run over the surface of impure waters. “Come, come!” these words were murmuring in the ears of Fernando like an incantation,--“Come!” and the mysterious woman called him to the brink of the abyss where she was poised, and seemed to offer him a kiss--a kiss----

Fernando took one step toward her--another--and felt arms slender and flexible twining about his neck and a cold sensation on his burning lips, a kiss of snow--wavered, lost his footing and fell, striking the water with a dull and mournful sound.

The waves leaped in sparks of light, and closed over his body, and their silvery circles went widening, widening until they died away on the banks.

THE BABUS OF NAYANJORE

The Project Gutenberg EBook of *The Hungry Stones And Other Stories*, by Rabindranath Tagore

I

Once upon a time the Babus of Nayanjore were famous landholders. They were noted for their princely extravagance. They would tear off the rough border of their Dacca muslin, because it rubbed against their skin. They could spend many thousands of rupees over the wedding of a kitten. On a certain grand occasion it is alleged that in order to turn night into day they lighted numberless lamps and showered silver threads from the sky to imitate sunlight. Those were the days before the flood. The flood came. The line of succession among these old-world Babus, with their lordly habits, could not continue for long. Like a lamp with too many wicks burning, the oil flared away quickly, and the light went out.

Kailas Babu, our neighbour, is the last relic of this extinct magnificence. Before he grew up, his family had very nearly reached its lowest ebb. When his father died, there was one dazzling outburst of funeral extravagance, and then insolvency. The property was sold to liquidate the debt. What little ready money was left over was altogether insufficient to keep up the past ancestral splendours.

Kailas Babu left Nayanjore, and came to Calcutta. His son did not remain long in this world of faded glory. He died, leaving behind him an only daughter.

In Calcutta we are Kailas Baba's neighbours. Curiously enough our own family history is just the opposite to his. My father got his money by his own exertions, and prided himself on never spending a penny more than was needed. His clothes were those of a working man, and his hands also. He never had any inclination to earn the title of Baba by extravagant display, and I myself his only son, owe him gratitude for that. He gave me the very best education, and I was able to make my way in the world. I am not ashamed of the fact that I am a self-made man. Crisp bank-notes in my safe are dearer to me than a long pedigree in an empty family chest.

I believe this was why I disliked seeing Kailas Baba drawing his heavy cheques on the public credit from the bankrupt bank of his ancient Babu

reputation I used to fancy that he looked down on me, because my father had earned money with his own hands.

I ought to have noticed that no one showed any vexation towards Kailas Babu except myself. Indeed it would have been difficult to find an old man who did less harm than he. He was always ready with his kindly little acts of courtesy in times of sorrow and joy. He would join in all the ceremonies and religious observances of his neighbours. His familiar smile would greet young and old alike. His politeness in asking details about domestic affairs was untiring. The friends who met him in the street were perforce ready to be button-holed, while a long string of questions of this kind followed one another from his lips:

"My dear friend, I am delighted to see you. Are quite well? How is Shashi? and Dada--is he all right? Do you know, I've only just heard that Madhu's son has got fever. How is he? Have you heard? And Hari Charan Babu--I've not seen him for a long time--I hope he is not ill. What's the matter with Rakkhal? And, er--er, how are the ladies of your family?"

Kailas Balm was spotlessly neat in his dress on all occasions, though his supply of clothes was sorely limited. Every day he used to air his shirts and vests and coats and trousers carefully, and put them out in the sun, along with his bed-quilt, his pillowcase, and the small carpet on which he always sat. After airing them he would shake them, and brush them, and put them on the rock. His little bits of furniture made his small room decent, and hinted that there was more in reserve if needed. Very often, for want of a servant, he would shut up his house for a while. Then he would iron out his shirts and linen with his own hands, and do other little menial tasks. After this he would open his door and receive his friends again.

Though Kailas Balm, as I have said, had lost all his landed property, he had still same family heirlooms left. There was a silver cruet for sprinkling scented water, a filigree box for otto-of-roses, a small gold salver, a costly ancient shawl, and the old-fashioned ceremonial dress and ancestral turban. These he had rescued with the greatest difficulty from the money-lenders' clutches. On every suitable occasion he would bring them out in state, and thus try to save the world-famed dignity of the Babus of Nayanjore. At heart the most modest of men, in his daily speech he regarded it as a sacred duty, owed to his rank, to give free play to his family pride. His friends would encourage this trait in his character with kindly good-humour, and it gave them great amusement.

The neighbourhood soon learnt to call him their Thakur Dada (Grandfather). They would flock to his house, and sit with him for hours together. To prevent his incurring any expense, one or other of his friends would bring him tobacco, and say: "Thakur Dada, this morning some tobacco was sent to me from Gaya. Do take it, and see how you like it."

Thakur Dada would take it, and say it was excellent. He would then go on to tell of a certain exquisite tobacco which they once smoked in the old days at Nayanjore at the cost of a guinea an ounce.

"I wonder," he used to say, "I wonder if any one would like to try it now. I have some left, and can get it at once."

Every one knew, that, if they asked for it, then somehow or other the key of the cupboard would be missing; or else Ganesh, his old family servant, had put it away somewhere.

"You never can be sure," he would add, "where things go to when servants are about. Now, this Ganesh of mine,--I can't tell you what a fool he is, but I haven't the heart to dismiss him."

Ganesh, for the credit of the family, was quite ready to bear all the blame without a word.

One of the company usually said at this point: "Never mind, Thakur Dada. Please don't trouble to look for it. This tobacco we're smoking will do quite well. The other would be too strong."

Then Thakur Dada would be relieved, and settle down again, and the talk would go on.

When his guests got up to go away, Thakur Dada would accompany them to the door, and say to them on the door-step: "Oh, by the way, when are you all coming to dine with me?"

One or other of us would answer: "Not just yet, Thakur Dada, not just yet. We'll fix a day later."

"Quite right," he would answer. "Quite right. We had much better wait till the rains come. It's too hot now. And a grand rich dinner such as I should want to give you would upset us in weather like this."

But when the rains did come, every one careful not to remind him of his promise. If the subject was brought up, some friend would suggest gently that it was very inconvenient to get about when the rains were so severe, that it would be much better to wait till they were over. And so the game went on.

His poor lodging was much too small for his position, and we used to condole with him about it. His friends would assure him they quite understood his difficulties: it was next to impossible to get a decent house in Calcutta. Indeed, they had all been looking out for years for a house to suit him, but, I need hardly add, no friend had been foolish enough to find one. Thakur Dada used to say, after a long sigh of

resignation: "Well, well, I suppose I shall have to put up with this house after all." Then he would add with a genial smile: "But, you know, I could never bear to be away from my friends. I must be near you. That really compensates for everything."

Somehow I felt all this very deeply indeed. I suppose the real reason was, that when a man is young stupidity appears to him the worst of crimes. Kailas Babu was not really stupid. In ordinary business matters every one was ready to consult him.

But with regard to Nayanjore his utterances were certainly void of common sense. Because, out of amused affection for him, no one contradicted his impossible statements, he refused to keep them in bounds. When people recounted in his hearing the glorious history of Nayanjore with absurd exaggerations he would accept all they said with the utmost gravity, and never doubted, even in his dreams, that any one could disbelieve it.

II

When I sit down and try to analyse the thoughts and feelings that I had towards Kailas Babu I see that there was a still deeper reason for my dislike. I will now explain.

Though I am the son of a rich man, and might have wasted time at college, my industry was such that I took my M.A. degree in Calcutta University when quite young. My moral character was flawless. In addition, my outward appearance was so handsome, that if I were to call myself beautiful, it might be thought a mark of self-estimation, but could not be considered an untruth.

There could be no question that among the young men of Bengal I was regarded by parents generally as a very eligible match. I was myself quite clear on the point, and had determined to obtain my full value in the marriage market. When I pictured my choice, I had before my mind's eye a wealthy father's only daughter, extremely beautiful and highly educated. Proposals came pouring in to me from far and near; large sums in cash were offered. I weighed these offers with rigid impartiality, in the delicate scales of my own estimation. But there was no one fit to be my partner. I became convinced, with the poet Bhabavuti, that

In this worlds endless time and boundless space
One may be born at last to match my sovereign grace.

But in this puny modern age, and this contracted space of modern Bengal, it was doubtful if the peerless creature existed as yet.

Meanwhile my praises were sung in many tunes, and in different metres, by designing parents.

Whether I was pleased with their daughters or not, this worship which they offered was never unpleasing. I used to regard it as my proper due, because I was so good. We are told that when the gods withhold their boons from mortals they still expect their worshippers to pay them fervent honour, and are angry if it is withheld. I had that divine expectance strongly developed in myself.

I have already mentioned that Thakur Dada had an only grand-daughter. I had seen her many times, but had never mistaken her for beautiful. No thought had ever entered my mind that she would be a possible partner for myself. All the same, it seemed quite certain to me that some day or other Kailas Babu would offer her, with all due worship, as an oblation at my shrine. Indeed-this was the secret of my dislike-I was thoroughly annoyed that he had not done it already.

I heard he had told his friends that the Babus of Nayanjore never craved a boon. Even if the girl remained unmarried, he would not break the family tradition. It was this arrogance of his that made me angry. My indignation smouldered for some time. But I remained perfectly silent, and bore it with the utmost patience, because I was so good.

As lightning accompanies thunder, so in my character a flash of humour was mingled with the mutterings of my wrath. It was, of course, impossible for me to punish the old man merely to give vent to my rage; and for a long time I did nothing at all. But suddenly one day such an amusing plan came into my head, that I could not resist the temptation of carrying it into effect.

I have already said that many of Kailas Babu's friends used to flatter the old man's vanity to the full. One, who was a retired Government servant, had told him that whenever he saw the Chota Lord Sahib he always asked for the latest news about the Babus of Nayanjore, and the Chota Lord had been heard to say that in all Bengal the only really respectable families were those of the Maharaja of Burdwan and the Babus of Nayanjore. When this monstrous falsehood was told to Kailas Balm he was extremely gratified, and often repeated the story. And wherever after that he met this Government servant in company he would ask, along with other questions:

"Oh! er--by the way, how is the Chota Lord Sahib? Quite well, did you say? Ah, yes, I am so delighted to hear it I And the dear Mem Sahib, is she quite well too? Ah, yes! and the little children-are they quite well also? Ah, yes I that's very good news! Be sure and give them my compliments when you see them."

Kailas Balm would constantly express his intention of going some day and paying a visit to the Sahib.

But it may be taken for granted that many Chota Lords and Burro Lords also would come and go, and much water would pass down the Hoogly, before the family coach of Nayanjore would be furnished up to pay a visit to Government House.

One day I took Kailas Babu aside, and told him in a whisper: "Thakur Dada, I was at the Levee yesterday, and the Chota Lord happened to mention the Babes of Nayanjore. I told him that Kailas Balm had come to town. Do you know, he was terribly hurt because you hadn't called. He told me he was going to put etiquette on one side, and pay you a private visit himself this very afternoon."

Anybody else could have seen through this plot of mine in a moment. And, if it had been directed against another person, Kailas Balm would have understood the joke. But after all he had heard from his friend the Government servant, and after all his own exaggerations, a visit from the Lieutenant-Governor seemed the most natural thing in the world. He became highly nervous and excited at my news. Each detail of the coming visit exercised him greatly--most of all his own ignorance of English. How on earth was that difficulty to be met? I told him there was no difficulty at all: it was aristocratic not to know English: and, besides, the Lieutenant-Governor always brought an interpreter with him, and he had expressly mentioned that this visit was to be private.

About mid-day, when most of our neighbours are at work, and the rest are asleep, a carriage and pair stopped before the lodging of Kailas Babu. Two flunkeys in livery came up the stairs, and announced in a loud voice, "The Chota Lord Sahib has arrived." Kailas Babu was ready, waiting for him, in his old-fashioned ceremonial robes and ancestral turban, and Ganesh was by his side, dressed in his master's best suit of clothes for the occasion. When the Chota Lord Sahib was announced, Kailas Balm ran panting and puffing and trembling to the door, and led in a friend of mine, in disguise, with repeated salaams, bowing low at each step, and walking backward as best he could. He had his old family shawl spread over a hard wooden chair, and he asked the Lord Sahib to be seated. He then made a high flown speech in Urdu, the ancient Court language of the Sahibs, and presented on the golden salver a string of gold mohurs, the last relics of his broken fortune. The old family servant Ganesh, with an expression of awe bordering on terror, stood behind with the scent-sprinkler, drenching the Lord Sahib, touching him gingerly from time to time with the otto-of-roses from the filigree box.

Kailas Babu repeatedly expressed his regret at not being able to receive His Honour Bahadur with all the ancestral magnificence of his own family estate at Nayanjore. There he could have welcomed him properly with due ceremonial. But in Calcutta he was a mere stranger and sojourner-in fact a fish out of water.

My friend, with his tall silk hat on, very gravely nodded. I need hardly

say that according to English custom the hat ought to have been removed inside the room. But my friend did not dare to take it off for fear of detection; and Kailas Babu and his old servant Ganesh were sublimely unconscious of the breach of etiquette.

After a ten minutes' interview, which consisted chiefly of nodding the head, my friend rose to his feet to depart. The two flunkies in livery, as had been planned beforehand, carried off in state the string of gold mohurs, the gold salver, the old ancestral shawl, the silver scent-sprinkler, and the otto-of-roses filigree box; they placed them ceremoniously in the carriage. Kailas Babu regarded this as the usual habit of Chota Lard Sahibs.

I was watching all the while from the next room. My sides were aching with suppressed laughter. When I could hold myself in no longer, I rushed into a further room, suddenly to discover, in a corner, a young girl sobbing as if her heart would break. When she saw my uproarious laughter she stood upright in passion, flashing the lightning of her big dark eyes in mine, and said with a tear-choked voice:

"Tell me! What harm has my grandfather done to you? Why have you come to deceive him? Why have you come here? Why--"

She could say no more. She covered her face with her hands, and broke into sobs.

My laughter vanished in a moment. It had never occurred to me that there was anything but a supremely funny joke in this act of mine, and here I discovered that I had given the cruelest pain to this tenderest little heart. All the ugliness of my cruelty rose up to condemn me. I slunk out of the room in silence, like a kicked dog.

Hitherto I had only looked upon Kusum, the grand-daughter of Kailas Babu, as a somewhat worthless commodity in the marriage market, waiting in vain to attract a husband. But now I found, with a shock of surprise, that in the corner of that room a human heart was beating.

The whole night through I had very little sleep. My mind was in a tumult. On the next day, very early in the morning, I took all those stolen goods back to Kailas Babu's lodgings, wishing to hand them over in secret to the servant Ganesh. I waited outside the door, and, not finding any one, went upstairs to Kailas Babu's room. I heard from the passage Kusum asking her grandfather in the most winning voice: "Dada, dearest, do tell me all that the Chota Lord Sahib said to you yesterday. Don't leave out a single word. I am dying to hear it all over again."

And Dada needed no encouragement. His face beamed over with pride as he related all manner of praises, which the Lard Sahib had been good enough to utter concerning the ancient families of Nayanjore. The girl was

seated before him, looking up into his face, and listening with rapt attention. She was determined, out of love for the old man, to play her part to the full.

My heart was deeply touched, and tears came to my eyes. I stood there in silence in the passage, while Thakur Dada finished all his embellishments of the Chota Lord Sahib's wonderful visit. When he left the room at last, I took the stolen goods and laid them at the feet of the girl and came away without a word.

Later in the day I called again to see Kailas Balm himself. According to our ugly modern custom, I had been in the habit of making no greeting at all to this old man when I came into the room. But on this day I made a low bow, and touched his feet. I am convinced the old man thought that the coming of the Chota Lord Sahib to his house was the cause of my new politeness. He was highly gratified by it, and an air of benign severity shone from his eyes. His friends had flocked in, and he had already begun to tell again at full length the story of the Lieutenant-Governor's visit with still further adornments of a most fantastic kind. The interview was already becoming an epic, both in quality and in length.

When the other visitors had taken their leave, I made my proposal to the old man in a humble manner. I told him that, "though I could never for a moment hope to be worthy of marriage connection with such an illustrious family, yet... etc. etc."

When I made clear my proposal of marriage, the old man embraced me, and broke out in a tumult of joy: "I am a poor man, and could never have expected such great good fortune."

That was the first and last time in his life that Kailas Babu confessed to being poor. It was also the first and last time in his life that he forgot, if only for a single moment, the ancestral dignity that belongs to the Babus of Nayanjore.

THE QUEST OF THE SWORD

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His old widowed mother would not die happy unless he were rehabilitated, and to this end he knew that she and his faithful wife, O Yumi, prayed daily before the family shrine.

How often had he racked his brains to find some way by which it were possible to prove his unchanging fidelity to Shusen; for the true

big-hearted fellow never resented his punishment, but staunchly believed that the ties which bound him to his lord were in no wise annulled by the separation.

At last the long-awaited opportunity had come. In obedience to the mandate of the Shogun Ieyasu that the territorial nobles should reside in his newly established capital of Yedo during six months of the year, the Daimio of Tokushima proceeded to Yedo accompanied by a large retinue of samurai, amongst whom were his chief retainers, the rivals Shusen Sakurai and Gunbei Onoto.

Like a faithful watchdog, alert and anxious, Jurobei had followed Shusen at a distance, unwilling to let him out of his sight at this critical time, for Gunbei Onoto was the sworn enemy of Shusen Sakurai. Bitter envy of his rival's popularity, and especially of his senior rank in the Daimio's service, had always rankled in the contemptible Gunbei's mind. For years he had planned to supplant him, and Jurobei knew through traitors that the honest vigilance of his master had recently thwarted Gunbei in some of his base schemes, and that the latter had vowed immediate vengeance.

Jurobei's soul burned within him as this sequence of thoughts rushed through his brain. The tempest that whirled round him seemed to be in harmony with the emotions that surged in tumult through his heart.

More than ever did it devolve on him to see that his master was properly safeguarded. To do this successfully he must once more become his retainer. So Jurobei with vehement resolution clenched his hands over the handle of his umbrella and rushed onwards.

Now it happened that same night that Gunbei, in a sudden fit of jealous rage and chagrin, knowing that his rival was on duty at the Daimio's Palace, and that he would probably return alone after night-fall, ordered two of his men to proceed to Shusen's house and to waylay and murder Shusen on his road home. Once and for all he would remove Shusen Sakurai from his path.

Meanwhile Jurobei arrived at Shusen's house, and in the heavy gloom collided violently with the two men who were lying in ambush outside the gate.

"Stop!" angrily cried the assassins, drawing their swords upon him.

Jurobei, recognizing their voices and his quick wit at once grasping the situation, exclaimed:

"You are Gunbei's men! Have you come to kill my lord?"

"Be assured that that is our intention," replied the confederates.

"I pray you to kill me instead of my lord," implored Jurobei.

"We have come for your master and we must have his life as well as yours. I have not forgotten how you cut me to pieces seven years ago. I shall enjoy paying back those thrusts with interest," returned one of them sharply.

Jurobei prostrated himself in the mud before them. "I care not what death you deal me, so long as you accept my life instead of my lord's. I humbly beg of you to grant my petition."

Instead of answering, one of the miscreants contemptuously kicked him as he knelt there.

Jurobei, whose ire was now thoroughly provoked, seized the offending leg before its owner had time to withdraw it, and holding it in a clutch like iron, inquired:

"Then you do not intend to grant my request?"

"Certainly not!" sneered the wretches.

Jurobei sprang to his feet and faced them. Without more ado they both set upon him with their weapons.

Overhead the storm increased in violence. The floodgates of heaven were opened, peals of heavy thunder shook the earth with their dull reverberations, and the inky skies were riven with blinding flash upon flash of forked lightning, which lit up the dark forms and white faces of the combatants, and glinted on their swords as they parried and clashed together in mortal strife.

Now Jurobei was an expert swordsman of unusual and supple strength. He defended himself with skill and ferocity, and soon his superiority began to tell against the craven couple who were attacking him. It was not long before they realized that they were no match for such a powerful adversary, and turned to flee. But Jurobei was too quick for them, and before they could escape he cut them down.

Mortally wounded, both men fell to the ground, and so fatal had been Jurobei's thrusts that in a few minutes they breathed their last.

By this time, the fury of the storm having spent itself, the sky gradually lifted and the moon shone forth in silver splendour between the masses of clouds as they rolled away, leaving the vast blue vault above clear and radiant and scintillating with stars.

Jurobei raised a jubilant face heavenwards and thanked the gods for

the victory. He had rescued his master from death. He felt that the sacrifices that he and O Yumi had made in the past--the breaking up of the old home and the parting from their baby-daughter and the old mother--had not been in vain. The prescience, which had warned him that evil was hanging over Shusen, and which had made him so restless and uneasy of late, had been fulfilled, and he had forestalled the dastardly intention of the treacherous Gunbei and his two scoundrels.

In the stillness after the tumult of the fray, Jurobei's ear caught the sound of approaching footsteps. Turning in the direction from whence they came, there in the bright moonlight he clearly discerned the form of his beloved master, crossing the bridge.

"Oh, my lord! Is it you? Are you safe?" he exclaimed.

"Who is it?" demanded the startled _samurai. "Ah--it is Jurobei! What brings you here at this hour?" Then noticing the two lifeless bodies lying across the path, he sharply interrogated, "What does this mean? Has there been a fight? What was the cause of the quarrel?"

"They are Gunbei's assassins. They were waiting in ambush for your return, by Gunbei's order. I found them here. They attacked me and I killed them both, the cowards!"

Shusen started. An exclamation of dismay escaped him.

"It is a pity that you should have killed those particular men at this juncture." He mused for a few seconds, gazing at the dead faces of his would-be murderers. "I knew these rascals. My purpose was to let them go free, and to lure them over to our side: they could soon have been persuaded to confess the crimes of their master."

Jurobei realized that he had blundered. Overcome with disappointment, he sank upon the ground in a disconsolate heap.

"The intelligence of inferior men cannot be relied upon," said Jurobei with chagrin. "Alas, they unwittingly err in their judgment. I did not give the matter enough consideration. My sole idea was to save your life at all costs, my lord! I have committed a grave error in slaying them. With the intention of tendering abject apologies for my past misconduct, which has lain upon me like a heavy yoke all these years, I came here to-night. I killed these men to save your life--hoping that for this service you would reinstate me. I beg of you to forgive my stupidity."

[Illustration: Mortally wounded, both men fell to the ground, and so fatal had been Jurobei's thrusts that in a few minutes they breathed their last.]

With these words he drew his sword and was about to plunge it into himself and rashly end his life by _hara-kiri_, by way of expiation.

Shusen seized his arm and stopped him in the act. "This is not the time to die! It would be a dog's death to kill yourself here and now. Perform some deed worthy of a _samurai_ and then I will recall you as my retainer. You are a rash man, Jurobei! In future think more before you act."

"Oh, my lord, do you really forgive me? Will you indeed spare a life forfeited by many errors committed in your service?" and Jurobei gave a sigh of relief.

"Certainly I will," replied Shusen, aware that the affinity existing between lord and retainer is a close relationship not to be lightly severed.

"You were about to throw away your life," he continued, "for what you considered a _samurai's_ duty. I commend that, anyhow! I tell you now to wait until you have accomplished some real work in the world. Listen to what I have to say.

"From generation to generation the Lords of Tokushima have entrusted to the care of our house one of their most valuable treasures and heirlooms, a talisman of the family, the Kunitsugu sword. At the end of last year we gave a banquet and entertained a large number of friends. While the attention of every one was absorbed in waiting upon the guests, some robber must have entered the house and stolen the sword, for on that night it disappeared.

"In my own mind I have strong suspicions as to who the guilty party may be, but as yet there is no proof. While I was pondering in secret over possible ways and means of bringing the theft to light, another complication has arisen.

"It has come to my knowledge that Gunbei, our enemy, is organizing a conspiracy to make an attack upon the life of my lord, the Daimio of Tokushima. My whole attention must be concentrated on this plot, to circumvent which requires very subtle and adroit handling, so that it is impossible for me to take any steps in the matter of the sword at the present time. There is no one to whom I can entrust this important mission except yourself, Jurobei. If you have any gratitude for all that I have done for you, then stake your life, your all, in the search for the lost sword.

"There is no time to lose! This is January and our Daimio's birthday falls on the third of March. The sword must be laid out in state on that festive occasion in the palace. I shall be disgraced and my house ruined if the sword be not forthcoming that day. My duties at

the palace make it impossible for me to undertake the search. Even supposing that I were at liberty to go in quest of the sword, to do so would bring about my undoing, which is just what our enemy Gunbei desires. You are now a _ronin_ [a masterless _samurai_], you have no master, no duty, no appearances to maintain. Your absence from our midst will cause embarrassment to no one. Therefore undertake this mission, I command you, and restore the sword to our house. If your search is crowned with success, I will receive you back into my household, and all shall be as it was between us in former times."

With this assurance Sakurai took his own sword from his girdle and handed it to Jurobei as a pledge of the compact between them.

Jurobei stretched out both hands, received it with joy, and reverently raised it to his forehead.

"Your merciful words touch my heart. Though my body should be broken to pieces I will surely not fail to recover the sword," replied Jurobei.

He then began to examine the dead men hoping to find their purses, for in his new-formed resolution he realized the immediate need of money in his search for the lost treasure.

"Stop, stop!" rebuked Shusen, "take nothing which does not belong to you, not even a speck of dust."

"_Kiritori goto wa bushi no narai_" [Slaughter and robbery are a knight's practice], answered Jurobei, "has been the _samurai's_ motto from ancient times. For the sake of my lord I will stop at nothing. I will even become a robber. In token of my determination, from this hour I change my name Jurobei to Ginjuro. Nothing shall deter me in my search for the sword. To prosecute my search I will enter any houses, however large and grand they may be. Rest assured, my lord. I will be responsible for the finding of the sword."

"That is enough," returned his master. "You have taken the lives of these two men--escape before you are seized and delivered up to justice."

"I obey, my lord! May all go well with you till I give you a sign that the sword is found."

"Yes, yes, have no fear for me. Take care of yourself, Jurobei!" answered Shusen.

Jurobei prostrated himself at his master's feet.

"Farewell, my lord!"

"Farewell!"

And Shusen Sakurai and his faithful vassal separated.

PART II

On the quest of the lost sword Jurobei and his wife left Yedo buoyant with high hope and invincible courage.

The sword, however, was not to be found so easily. Jurobei was untiringly and incessantly on the alert, and week followed week in his fruitless search; however, his ardour was unabated, and firm was his resolution not to return until he could restore the missing treasure upon which the future of his master depended. Possessing no means of support, Jurobei became pirate, robber, and impostor by turns, for the samurai of feudal times considered that all means were justified in the cause of loyalty. The obstacles and difficulties that lay in his path, which might well have daunted weaker spirits, merely served to inflame his passion of duty to still greater enthusiasm.

After many adventures and hairbreadth escapes from the law, the vicissitudes of his search at last brought him to the town of Naniwa (present Osaka) where he halted for a while and found it convenient to rent a tiny house on the outskirts of the town. Here Jurobei met with a man named Izæmon who belonged to the same clan--one of the retainers of the Daimio of Tokushima and colleague of Shusen Sakurai.

Now it happened that an illegitimate half-sister of the Daimio by a serving-woman had sold herself into a house of ill-fame to render assistance to her mother's family which had fallen into a state of great destitution. As proof of her high birth she had in her possession a Kodzuka[1] which had been bestowed on her in infancy by her father, the Daimio. Izæmon, aware of her noble parentage, chivalrously followed her, and in order to redeem the unfortunate woman borrowed a sum of money from a man named Butaroku, who had proved to be a hard-hearted wretch, continually persecuting and harassing Izæmon on account of the debt. Jurobei was distressed by Butaroku's treatment of his clansman, and magnanimously undertook to assume all responsibility himself. The day had come when the bond fell due and the money had to be refunded. Jurobei was well aware that before nightfall he must manage by some way or another to obtain the means to satisfy his avaricious creditor or both himself and Izæmon would be made to suffer for the delay.

At his wit's end he started out in the early morning, leaving his wife, O Yumi, alone.

Shortly after his departure a letter was brought to the house. In those

remote days there was, of course, no regular postal service, and only urgent news was transmitted by messengers. The arrival of a letter was, therefore, looked upon as the harbinger of some calamity or as conveying news of great importance. In some trepidation, therefore, O Yumi tore open the communication, only to find that her fears were confirmed. It proved to be a warning from one of Jurobei's followers with the information that the police had discovered the rendezvous of his men--some of whom had been captured while others had managed to escape. The writer, moreover, apprehended that the officers of law were on the track of Jurobei himself, and begged him to lose no time in fleeing to some place of safety. This intelligence sorely troubled O Yumi. "Even though my husband's salary is so trifling yet he is a _samurai_ by birth. The reason why he has fallen so low is because he desires above all things to succeed in restoring the Kunitsugu sword. As a _samurai_ he must be always prepared to sacrifice his life in his master's service if loyalty demands it, but should the misdeeds he has committed during the search be discovered before the sword is found, his long years of fidelity, of exile, of deprivation, of hardship will all have been in vain. It is terrible to contemplate. Not only this, his good qualities will sink into oblivion, and he will be reviled as a robber and a law-breaker even after he is dead. What a deplorable disgrace! He has not done evil because his heart is corrupt--oh, no, no!"

Overcome with these sad reflections, she turned to the corner where stood the little shrine dedicated to Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy and Compassion, and sinking upon her knees she prayed with the earnestness of a last hope, that the holy Kwannon would preserve her husband's life until his mission should be accomplished and the sword safely returned to its princely owner.

As she was kneeling before the shrine there floated into the room from outside the sound of a pilgrim's song chanted in a child's sweet treble.

Fudaraku ya!
Kishi utsu nami ya
Mi Kumano no
Nachi no oyama ni
Hibiku takitsuse.

Goddess of Mercy, hail!
I call and lo!
The beat of surf on shore
Suffers a heaven-change
To the great cataract's roar
On Nachi's holy range
In hallowed Kumano.[2]

O Yumi arose from her knees and went out to ascertain who the singer

could be. A little girl about nine years of age was standing in the porch. On her shoulders was strapped a pilgrim's pack. Again she sang:

Furusato wo
Harubaru, kokoni
kii--Miedera
Hana no Miyako mo
Chikaku naruran.

From home and birth
Far ways of earth
Forwandered here
Kii's holy place
A sojourn's space
Receives me, ere
Anon thy bowers,
City of Flowers,[3]
(Life's goal) draw near.

When she saw that some one had appeared, her song ceased, and she plaintively added:

"Be kind enough to give alms to a poor little pilgrim."

"My pretty little pilgrim," answered O Yumi, "I will gladly give you some alms," and placing a few coins in a fold of paper she handed it out to her.

"I thank you from my heart!" responded the child in grateful accents. By the manner in which these words were uttered, and in spite of the travel-stained dress and the dust of the road, it was apparent to O Yumi that the little girl before her was no common beggar, but a beautiful and well-born child. Naturally of a fair complexion, her eyes were clear and bright, her dishevelled hair was long and jet black. The hardships of the pilgrimage had left their mark upon the child, she was thin and seemed so weary, that it filled the heart with pity. O Yumi found her thoughts carried back to the infant she had been compelled to leave behind in the old home seven long years before, when she and Jurobei had followed their lord Shusen Sakurai to Yedo.

For some inexplicable reason she felt strangely touched by the plight of the little girl before her, and reflected sadly that her own child--so far away, and deprived at such an early age of her mother's love and care--would now be somewhat of the same age and size as the little pilgrim.

"Dear child," said O Yumi, "I suppose you are travelling with your parents. Tell me what province you came from?"

"My native province is Tokushima of Awa," was the reply.

"What?" exclaimed O Yumi. "Did you say Tokushima? That is where I was born, too! My heart thrills at hearing the beloved name of the place of my birth. And so you are making a pilgrimage with your parents?"

The woman's question was a reasonable one, for a Buddhist pilgrim wanders around from temple to temple all over the country to worship the founder of their faith and patron saints, and it was most unlikely that a child of such tender years should set out alone upon so long and arduous a journey. It was, indeed, a great distance from Tokushima, in the Island of Shikoku, to the town of Naniwa. But the little girl shook her head and answered in forlorn accents:

"No, no. I have not seen my parents for seven years. I have left my home in Awa and come upon this long pilgrimage entirely in the hope of finding them."

On hearing these words O Yumi became agitated in mind. Perchance this child might prove to be her own daughter! Drawing near the little pilgrim and scanning her features eagerly, she asked:

"Why do you go on this pilgrimage to seek your parents? Tell me their names?"

"When I was only two years of age my parents left our native place. I have been brought up entirely by my grandmother. For several months now we have had no news of them, since they followed our lord to Yedo; they seem to have left Yedo, but no one knew whither they went. I am wandering in search of them: my one wish being to look upon their faces if but once again in this life. My father's name is Jurobei of Awa and my mother is called O Yumi."

"What? Your father is Jurobei and your mother O Yumi?" stammered out the astonished parent, greatly taken aback by this statement. "And they parted from you when you were two years of age, and you were brought up by your grandmother?"

Oh! there was no room for doubt. An angel must have guided the wandering footsteps of the little pilgrim, for it was indeed her own little daughter, the sole blossom of her youth and early married life. The more carefully O Yumi regarded the child, the more her memory convinced her that in the young face before her she could trace the baby features so sadly missed for seven long years--and finally her eager eyes detected an undeniable proof of her identity--a tiny mole high up on the child's forehead.

The poor mother was on the verge of bursting into tears and crying out: "Oh, oh! You are indeed my own, O Tsuru!" But with a painful effort she

realized what such a disclosure would mean to the child.

"Who knows!" reflected the unhappy woman. "My husband and I may be arrested at any moment. I am indeed prepared for the worst that may befall us--even to be thrown into prison--but if I disclose my identity to O Tsuru, she must inevitably share our misery.[4] It is in the interest of my poor child's welfare that I send her away without revealing the truth which would expose her to untold trouble and disgrace."

In those ancient times the criminal law enacted that innocent children should be implicated in the offences of the parents, and that the same sentence of punishment should cover them also. Love gave clearness to the workings of her mind, and in a moment O Yumi remembered what was threatening them and the inexorable decrees of the law. Involuntarily her arms were extended with the mother's instinct to gather the child to her heart, but she quickly controlled her emotion and did her best to address the little girl in a calm voice:

"Oh, yes, I understand. For one so young you have come a long, long way. It is wonderful that alone and on foot you could traverse such a great and weary distance, and your filial devotion is indeed worthy of praise. If your parents could know of this they would weep for joy. But things are not as we wish in this sad world, life is not as the heart of man desires, alas! You say your father and mother had to leave you, their little babe, for whose sake they would gladly sacrifice their own souls and bodies. My poor child, they must have had some very urgent reason for parting from you in this way. You must not feel injured nor bear them any resentment on that account."

"No, no," replied the little one intelligently, "it would be impious even to dream of such a feeling. Never have I felt resentment even for a single moment against my parents, for it was not their wish or intention to forsake me. But as they left me when I was only a baby I have no recollection of their faces, and whenever I see other children being tended and cherished by their mothers, or at night hushed to rest in their mother's arms, I cannot help envying them. I have longed and prayed ever since I can remember that I might be united to my own mother, and know what it is to be loved and cherished like all the other children! Oh, when I think that I may never see her again, I am very, very sad!"

The lonely child had begun to sob while pouring out the grief that lay so near her heart, and the tears that she could no longer restrain were coursing, _porori, porori_, down her cheeks.

O Yumi felt as though her heart was well-nigh breaking. Indeed, the woman's anguish at being an impotent witness of the sorrows of her forsaken child was of far greater intensity than the woes of the little

girl's narration, yet as she answered, the mother's heart felt as though relentless circumstances had transformed her into a monster of cruelty!

"In this life there is no deeper _Karma_-relation than that existing between parent and child, yet children frequently lose their parents, or the child sometimes may be taken first. Such is the way of this world. As I said before, the desire of the heart is seldom gratified. You are searching for your parents whose faces you could not even recognize, and of whose whereabouts you are entirely ignorant. All the hardships of this pilgrimage will be endured in vain unless you are able to discover them, which is very improbable. Take my advice. It would be much better for you to give up the search and to return at once to your native province."

"No, no, for the sake of my beloved parents," expostulated the child, "I will devote my whole life to the search for them, if necessary. But of all my hardships in this wandering life the one that afflicts me most is that, as I travel alone, no one will give me a night's lodging, so that I am obliged to sleep either in the fields or on the open mountain-side; indeed, at times I seek an unwilling shelter beneath the eaves of some house, from whence I am often driven away with blows. Whenever I go through these terrible experiences I cannot help thinking that if only my parents were with me I should not be treated in this pitiless way. Oh! some one must tell me where they are! I long to see them ... I long ..." and the poor little vagrant burst out into long wailing sobs.

The distracted mother was torn between love and duty. Oblivious of everything, for one moment she lost her presence of mind and clasped her daughter to her heart.

She was on the point of exclaiming:

"My poor little stray lamb! I cannot let you go! Look at me, I am your own mother! Is it not marvellous that you should have found me?"

But only her lips moved silently, for she did not dare to let the child know the truth. She herself was prepared for any fate however bitter, but the innocent O Tsuru must be shielded from the suffering which would ultimately be the lot of her father and mother as the penalty for breaking the law. Fortified by this resolution, the Spartan mother regained her self-control and managed to repress the overwhelming tide of impulse which almost impelled her, in spite of all, to reveal her identity.

Holding the little form closely to her breast she murmured tenderly:

"I have listened to your story so carefully that your troubles seem to

have become mine own, and there are no words to express the sorrow and pity I feel for your forlorn condition. However, 'while there is life there is hope' [_inochi atte monodane_]. Do not despair, you may some day be united to your parents. If, however, you determine to continue this pilgrimage, the hardships and fatigues you must undergo will inevitably ruin your health. It is far better for you to return to the shelter of your grand-mother's roof than to persist in such a vague search and with so little prospect of success. It may be that before long your parents will return to you, who knows! My advice is good, and I beg you to go back to your home at once, and there patiently await their coming."

Thus O Yumi managed to keep up the pretence of being a stranger, and at the same time to give to her own flesh and blood all the help and comfort that her mother's heart could devise. But nature would not be disguised, and although she knew it not, a passion of love and yearning thrilled in her voice and manner and communicated itself to the child's heart.

"Yes, yes," answered the little creature in appealing tones. "Indeed, I thank you. Seeing you weep for me, I feel as if you were indeed my own mother and I no longer wish to go from here. I pray you to let me stay with you. Since I left my home no one has been so kind to me as you. Do not drive me away. I will promise to do all you bid me if only you will let me stay."

"Do you wish to make me weep with your sad words?" was all that O Yumi could stammer out, her voice broken with agitation. After a moment she added: "As I have already told you, I feel towards you as though you were indeed my own daughter, and I have been wondering if by any means it would be possible to keep you with me. But it cannot be. I am obliged to seem cold-hearted and to send you away, and all that I can tell you is that for your own sake you must not remain here. I hope you fully understand and will return to your home at once."

With these words O Yumi went quickly to an inner room, and taking all the silver money she possessed from her little hoard she offered it to O Tsuru, saying:

"Although you are travelling in this solitary and unprotected state you will always find some one ready to give you a night's lodging if you can offer them money. Take this. It is not much, but receive it as a little token of my sympathy. Make use of it as best you can and return to your native province without delay."

"Your kindness makes me very happy, but as far as money is concerned I have many _koban_ [coins of pure gold used in ancient times], I am going now. Thank you again and again for all your goodness to me," replied O Tsuru in wounded accents, and showing by a gesture that she

refused the proffered assistance.

"Even if you have plenty of money--take this in remembrance of our meeting. Oh ... you can never know how sad I am at parting from you, you poor little one!"

O Yumi stooped down and was brushing away the dust which covered the hem of O Tsuru's dress.

"Oh, you must never think that I want to let you go.... Your little face reminds me of one who is the most precious to me in all the world, and whom I may never see again."

Overcome with the passion of mother-love, she enfolded the poor little wayfarer in a close embrace, and the little girl, nestling in the arms of her own mother, thought she was merely a stranger whose pity was evoked by the recital of her sufferings.

Instinct, however, stirred in her heart, and she could not bear the thought of leaving her new-found friend. But since it was impossible for her to stay with this compassionate woman, nothing remained but for her to depart. Slowly and reluctantly she passed out from the porch, again and again wistfully looking back at the kind face, and as O Tsuru resumed her journey down the dusty road she murmured a little prayer:

"Alas! Shall I ever find my parents! I implore thee to grant my petition, O great and merciful Kwannon Sama!" and her tremulous voice grew stronger with the hopefulness of childhood as she chanted the song of the pilgrim.

_ Chichi haha no _
_ Megumi mo fukahi _
_ Kogawa-dera _
_ Hotoke no chikai _
_ Tanomoshiki Kana _.

Father-love, mother-love,
Theirs is none other love
Than in these Courts is mine.
Safe at Kogawa's shrine,
Yea, Buddha's Vows endure,
Verily a refuge sure.

Meanwhile, from the gate, the unhappy mother sadly followed with her eyes the pathetic little figure disappearing on her unknown path into the gathering twilight, while the last glow of sunset faded from the sky. The little song of faith and hope sounded like sardonic mockery in her ears. In anguish she covered her face with her sleeves and sobbed:

"My child--my child--turn back and show me your face once more! As by a miracle her wandering footsteps have been guided to the longed-for haven from far across the sea and the distant mountains. Oh, to have ruthlessly driven her away! What must our _Karma_-relation have been in previous existences! What retribution is this! What must have been my sin to receive such punishment!"

While these torturing reflections voiced themselves in broken utterance her daughter's shadow had vanished in the gloom, and O Yumi, standing at the gate, felt her grief become unbearable.

Vividly there arose before her mind the bitter pangs of leaving the old home and her baby child, and the misfortunes and poverty which had come upon them ever since Jurobei's discharge; the weariness and disappointment of the months of fruitless search for the lost sword; the homesickness of the exile banished from his own province and his lord's service by cruel circumstances; the disgrace which had now fallen upon her husband; all the accumulated pain of the past hushed to rest by the narcotic necessity of bearing each day's burden and meeting with courage and resource the ever-recurring difficulties and dangers of their hunted life. All these cruel phantom shapes arose to haunt the unhappy woman with renewed poignancy, sharpened by the agony of repression which her mother-love had been enduring for the past hour. Neither the arrow of hope which pierces the looming clouds of the future, nor the shield of resignation, would ever defend her again in this sorrow of sorrows. Suddenly a new resolve stirred her to action. "I can bear this no longer!" she cried frantically. "If we part now we may never meet again. I cannot let her go! From the fate that threatens us there may still be some way of escape. I must find her and bring her back."

Hastily gathering up the lower folds of her _kimono_ she rushed out into the road that wound between the rice-fields and the dark gnarled pines. The evening wind had begun to moan through the heavy branches, and as it tossed them to and fro, to her fevered imagination they seemed to be warning her to retrace her steps and to wave her back with ominous portent. On and on she sped along the lonely road into the shadowy vista beyond which her child had disappeared into the darkness....

[Illustration: The unhappy mother sadly followed with her eyes the pathetic little figure disappearing on her unknown path.]

PART III

The temple bell was booming the hour of parting day as Jurobei disconsolately hurried home. All his attempts had failed to procure the money wherewith to pay Izæmon's debt to Butaroku, and knowing that Butaroku was the kind of man to take a merciless revenge, he was in a mood of profound depression.

Suddenly in the road he came upon a group of beggars surrounding a little girl dressed as a pilgrim. The wretches, thinking her an easy prey to their cupidity, were tormenting the poor little wayfarer and trying to wrest from her the contents of her wallet, but she was bravely defending herself and resisting their attacks with great spirit.

Seeing how matters stood, Jurobei promptly drove the beggars away with his stick, and then, to avoid the return of her assailants, he compassionately took the child by the hand and led her home with him.

But alas! by a fatal mischance they had taken a different road to that chosen by O Yumi.

As soon as they reached the porch he called out:

"I have come back, O Yumi!"

Contrary to his expectation there was no response, and entering hastily he found the cottage empty and in darkness.

"How is it that the place is deserted? Where can O Yumi have gone to at this hour?" he grumbled as he groped his way across the room and set light to the standing lantern.

Then by its fitful glow he sank down upon the mats in gloomy abstraction and the lassitude of disappointment, and pondered seriously on the desperate straits to which he and his wife were reduced: the situation seemed hopeless, for well he knew that no clemency could be expected from the enemy and unless some money was forthcoming that very night he was a lost man. All at once a thought struck him. He beckoned the little pilgrim to draw near.

"Come here, my child! Those rascally beggars from whom I rescued you were trying to steal your wallet. Tell me, have you much money with you?"

"Yes, I have what several kind people have given me," was her reply.

"Let me see how much you have?" demanded Jurobei peremptorily.

O Tsuru, for indeed it was she, took out a little bag, and reluctantly offered a few coins for her inquisitor's inspection.

"Is this all you have, child?" he persisted impatiently.

"No, no, I have several _koban_[5] besides," answered the girl, her childish mind exaggerating the amount.

"Oh, indeed, so you have many _koban_?" Jurobei mused for a few minutes. Here was an unexpected opportunity to satisfy the avarice of Butaroku. "Let me take care of the _koban_ for you. It is not safe for you to keep them," said Jurobei, stretching out his hand towards her.

"No, no!" replied O Tsuru, shaking her head with decision. "When my grandmother was dying she made me promise faithfully never to show the money to any one, as it is tied together with a very precious thing. I must not give or show the bag to any one."

Jurobei, who saw deliverance from his debt of honour in the money he supposed the child to carry, tried to frighten her into giving it up to him, but she was firm in her refusal, and rose to her feet with the intention of escaping from her persecutor.

"Oh, I will stay here no longer. You frighten me!" she exclaimed, moving towards the porch.

Jurobei, in fear lest his last hope should fail, seized her by the collar of her dress.

"Oh, oh, help, help!" loudly screamed the girl in terror.

"What a noise, what a noise!" exclaimed Jurobei in exasperation, and alarmed lest the neighbours should overhear the child's cries, he roughly attempted to stifle her screams with his hand across her mouth.

For a few minutes, as a snared bird flutters in the net of its captor, the hapless O Tsuru put forth all her strength and endeavoured desperately to disengage herself; her struggles then subsided and she grew still.

Jurobei began to reason with her without removing his hold:

"There is nothing whatever to fear! The truth is I am in pressing need of some money. I do not know how much you have, but lend it to me for a few days. During that time stay here quietly. I will take you to visit the Temple of Kwannon Sama, and we will go every day to see the sights of the city near by and amuse ourselves. Never fear, only lend me all you have like a good child."

As he freed her she fell to the ground.

"What is the matter?" said Jurobei, anxiously bending over her little

form.

There was no answer. She lay quite still with no sign of life or motion.

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Jurobei. Thinking that she had fainted, he fetched water and sprinkled her pale face and tried to force a few drops between her closed lips, but there was not even a flicker of response.

The child lay dead before him. Worn out with the hardships and fatigues of the long, long pilgrimage, as a frail light flickers out before a rough gust of wind, her waning strength had failed in that last struggle. The griefs of earth were left behind and the brave little soul had set out on its longer journey to the _Meido_ (Hades).

Jurobei was thoroughly alarmed. In that tragic moment he knew not what to do. However, hearing his wife's returning footsteps, he hastily moved the body to one side of the room and covered it with a quilt.

O Yumi entered the room in great perturbation.

"Oh, oh! Help me to look for her, help me! While you were out this afternoon, wonderful to tell! who should come here in search for us but our own child, O Tsuru. How I longed to reveal myself to her, the poor, poor little one! But the knowledge that she must share our miserable fate when we are arrested, which may be at any moment now, forced me to send her away without telling her that I was her mother. After she had gone I could not bear the thought of never seeing her again. I ran after her, but she had disappeared! She cannot have gone far. I came back to fetch you. Let us look for her together."

Jurobei was dumbfounded at this totally unexpected intelligence. He stood up as though ready to start out into the night.

"How was she clothed? What kind of dress did she wear?" he asked hurriedly.

"She wore a long-sleeved robe brightly patterned with designs of spring blossoms, and on her shoulders she carried a pilgrim's pack."

"She carried a pilgrim's pack!" echoed Jurobei forlornly, and seized with an icy trembling. The frightful truth had flashed upon his brain. He knew that he had killed his own child!

O Yumi, wondering at his hesitation, prepared to start out again.

"You need not go to look for our child!" Jurobei hoarsely muttered.
"She is already here!"

"Has she come back?" cried O Yumi in excitement. "Tell me where she is."

"She is lying there under that quilt," he replied, pointing to where the body lay.

O Yumi quickly crossed the room and drew back the coverlet. "My child! Oh, my child! At last, at last I may call you so!" cried the delighted mother sinking on her knees in a transport of joy.

Long and tenderly she gazed at the little figure, lying prone before her. But how strange that her clothes were still unloosened and the heavy pack had not been unstrapped from the tired shoulders. O Yumi touched her hands and found them cold. Panic-stricken, she listened at the child's breast only to find her fears confirmed and that the little form was still and lifeless.

"Oh, oh, oh!" wailed O Yumi, "She is dead! She is dead!"

The shock was too deep for tears. For a moment the unhappy woman was paralysed.

Then turning to her husband:

"You must know how she died. Tell me! Tell me!" she gasped distractedly.

The half-dazed Jurobei related as well as he could all the events of that fatal afternoon. He finished his recital:

"I put my hand over her mouth to stop her screaming, and on releasing her she fell to the ground. I had no intention of killing her and pitied the poor unfortunate girl, though I had no idea that she was my little Tsuru. That I should have slain our own child must be the result of sin committed in one of the former states of existence, alas! Forgive me, O Yumi! Forgive me!" and the stricken man broke down and wept.

"Was it you, her father, who killed her?" cried O Yumi, in horror.

"Oh, my child, my own child!" she sobbed. "It was your fate to come in search of such cruel, unnatural parents. When you told me of the hardships you had suffered in looking for them, my soul was pierced with woe. When I refrained from making myself known to you I felt as though my heart must break. It was only the depth of my love for you that made me drive you away from our door. If only I had kept you here this would never have happened. This calamity has come upon us as a result of my driving you away. Forgive me, oh, forgive me! O Tsuru, O Tsuru!" and the miserable mother gathered the lifeless form of her little daughter to her breast and rocked herself to and fro in the frenzy of grief unutterable.

"Words are useless. What is done can never be undone. If only I had not known that she possessed the money to help me out of this crisis it would never have happened. Money is a curse!" he said in broken accents, as he took out from the folds of the child's dress the bag containing the coins. Opening it only three _ryo_[6] were disclosed.

"What a miserable pittance! Can this be all? I made a mistake in thinking she had a great deal. This certainly must be retribution for some bad action in my previous existence!"

His hand still searching the bag came upon a letter. He drew it forth and read the address:

"_To Jurobei and his Wife!_"

"Ah! this is my mother's handwriting!"

Jurobei tore it open and began to read:

"Ever since the day you left home we must have felt mutual anxiety concerning each other's health and welfare. This is the natural feeling between parent and child, so I shall not write more upon this subject, but inform you of the real reason for this letter without further detail.

"First of all what I wish to tell you is, that it has come to my knowledge that Onoto Gunbei has the lost Kunitsugu sword in his possession. Immediately I tried to obtain indisputable evidence of this fact, but as I am only a stupid woman, on second thoughts I feared that were I to take any steps in this direction it might result in more harm than good.

"Intending, therefore, to seek you out and let you proceed in this matter, I began to prepare myself and O Tsuru for the journey. But at the last moment I was suddenly taken with a mortal illness and was compelled to relinquish all hope of setting out to find you. I write this letter instead. As soon as it reaches your hands return home at once.

"Restore the sword to its rightful owner and earn your promotion--for this I shall wait beneath the flowers and the grass."

"Oh," exclaimed Jurobei, "then it was Gunbei who stole the sword. How grateful I am to my mother for this discovery. But what a cruel blow to think that she is dead!"

O Yumi took the letter from his hand and continued to read aloud:

"My greatest anxiety now is concerning little O Tsuru left helpless and friendless, and about to start alone on this journey. If by the mercy and help of the Gods she reaches you safely, bring her up tenderly and carefully. She is a clever child. She writes and plays the _koto_ well, besides being clever at her needle, and can skilfully sew _crêpe_ and silken robes. I myself have taken pains to instruct her, and am proud of my pupil. Give her an opportunity of showing her handiwork, and then praise her both of you.

"She brings with her the medicine which I have found by experience to suit her best. Should she ail at any time, fail not to administer it. Although repetition is irksome, yet again I beg you to take every care of my precious grandchild."

Here O Yumi, unable to read further, broke down in lamentations and cried aloud.

* * * * *

Now the spiteful Butaroku, finding that Jurobei did not come to pay Izæmon's debt according to agreement, was highly incensed. Knowing that the authorities were on the alert to seize Jurobei, he maliciously went and lodged information of his whereabouts.

Just at the moment they had finished reading the momentous letter the officers of the law arrived outside the house with a great noise, shouting and clamouring.

Jurobei and O Yumi, to gain a few minutes' time, snatched up the body of O Tsuru and quickly concealed themselves in a back room.

The police entered and a scene of wild confusion ensued. Confident of finding their prey hidden somewhere in the cupboards, they broke down the walls, the _shoji_, the boards of the ceiling, and even the little shrine dedicated to the Goddess Kwannon.

Jurobei had in those few moments braced himself up for a desperate fight. He would rather die than surrender to the law before his mission of finding the sword had been accomplished. Like a whirlwind he rushed into the room where his adversaries were battering down all before them, and like a demon of fury he attacked them, mortally slashing with his sword each man that attempted to lay hands on him.

The savage bravery of his onslaught was terrific, and so dexterous and unerring was his aim that he seemed possessed of superhuman strength:

his opponents were terror-stricken, and in a few minutes, like a spider's nest, when the threads of the binding web are broken by rough contact, they fled for their very lives and rushed scattered in all directions.

"Now is our time! Let us escape!" cried O Yumi.

Both began to run from the wrecked house.

"You have forgotten our child!" Jurobei whispered brokenly.

"She needs our anxiety no more. She is safe beyond the suffering of this world. We will bury her here before we leave."

Hurriedly retracing their steps they re-entered the house, and seizing the debris that lay strewn in all directions, placed it in a heap upon the little corpse. It was the work of a few moments to light the torches: this was the sole alternative that was left them to prevent their beloved dead from falling into the desecrating hands of callous strangers.

It was impossible to carry the body with them in their flight.

As the flames crackled and blazed up, Jurobei and O Yumi stood side by side, praying for the departed soul with uplifted hands placed palm to palm, while they watched the burning of their child's funeral pyre.

PART IV

It was springtime, and in the town of Tokushima the cherry-blossoms were bursting into bloom. The second of March[7] had come, and Onoto Gunbei was secretly rejoicing in the wicked thought that his schemes for the disgrace of his rival had been successful. Sakurai once removed from his path, his own advancement would be certain. To-morrow Sakurai must take the Kunitsugu sword to the palace and lay it in state before the Daimio. For reasons of his own Gunbei knew that this would be a matter of impossibility. Sakurai would therefore be suspected of having stolen it and his degradation would be the certain result.

Gunbei's sinister features relaxed into a malignant smile as he proudly stalked along the road on his way to the shrine at the western end of the town.

Two of his retainers were following at a respectful distance in his rear.

He had reached the precincts of the temple when one of these men came hurrying up:

"My lord! Jurobei, the man for whom you are constantly on the look out, is in that tea-house close by. I have just recognized him. What steps shall we take?"

"Very good!" said his master. "You have done well. Let us hide ourselves, and when he leaves the place rush upon him unawares and seize him."

Jurobei, after a short time, walked out from the hostelry. His mind was entirely engrossed with the thought that the sword must be retrieved from Gunbei's possession before the morrow, the third of the third month.

As he abstractedly strolled along, the enemy lying in ambush pounced upon him from behind. But his years of _ronin's_ hard and reckless life had trained his muscles to such phenomenal strength that in the tussle that followed, within a few rounds, he came off triumphantly the victor.

Gunbei, who had been a spectator of this unequal contest, drew his sword.

Jurobei, noting his action, caught up one of Gunbei's men and used him as a shield to ward off the blows.

The news of the fight was soon carried to Sakurai, who immediately hurried to the spot.

Directly he became aware of the identity of Gunbei's opponent, he shouted:

"What presumption to stand up and attack your superior. Surrender at once!"

He then turned to Gunbei.

"I will take him, therefore put up your sword."

Jurobei, who understood that this was strategy on his master's part, obediently allowed himself to be bound. Sakurai then handed him over to Gunbei, who gave him in charge of his henchmen and bade them conduct him to his house.

Gunbei's joy was extreme at having Jurobei in his power. He ordered him to be secured to a tree in the inner garden while he stood and mocked at him.

"Ho, Jurobei! I have a grudge to pay off against you. Why did you kill two of my men three months ago--tell me that?"

"I slew them because they intended to murder my master," replied Jurobei.

"Indeed! I believe that you are also the man who stole the sword for which your master is responsible--ho, ho, ho! You are both robbers, you must have connived at the theft of the sword together--confess!"

"You may say what you like of me, but you lie with regard to Shusen."

In a rage Gunbei and his accomplices put their sheathed swords beneath the ropes which bound Jurobei, and twisted them round and round so that they cut into the flesh and inflicted great torture on their victim.

Now it happened that Takao, the Daimio's illegitimate half-sister, whom Izæmon had been enabled to rescue from the infamous quarter through Jurobei's help, had been taking refuge in Sakurai's home. Here she had been seen by Gunbei, who had fallen madly in love with her beauty, and had planned to make her his mistress. One day in the absence of Sakurai he had sent his retainer, Dotetsuke, to carry her off by force.

Takao, now installed beneath Gunbei's roof, was obliged to listen to his dishonourable advances, but so far had managed to repel them. She was in the secret of the lost sword, and her purpose was to use the present occasion as an opportunity of laying hands on it if possible.

On hearing the commotion she opened the _shoji_ and eagerly scanned the direction whence it arose. To her astonishment and distress she recognized in the bound and helpless form none other than her valiant friend Jurobei. The thought that she owed her deliverance from her wretched past to his chivalrous generosity flashed through her mind. Trained to resource and intrigue, on the spur of the moment she resolved to pretend that Jurobei was her brother. This feigned relationship would afford them facilities for consultation concerning the sword. Impetuously advancing to the edge of the veranda, she looked earnestly at the captive and uttered a piteous cry:

"Oh, oh! it is my brother! Oh! my poor brother!"

"This is interesting!" jeered Gunbei. "Are you really brother and sister?"

Takao implored Gunbei to release Jurobei.

"If you listen to me I will set him free," replied Gunbei, whose desire was all the more inflamed by her rejection of his suit. "But if you

refuse to obey me, I will torture him with both fire and water."

Takao wept with her face hidden in her sleeves. "Is it possible that you are a _samurai_?" she sobbed.

"Does your heart know no sympathy--no mercy? This is unendurable! I cannot bear to see it!"

"It is you who know no sympathy either for me or your brother. I have made conditions with you, Takao. It rests entirely with you. Accept my love and you are both free."

"Such a matter cannot be decided of my own will. I am a woman and not a free agent. I must consult my elder brother."

"Very well," responded Gunbei, "if you cannot decide this by yourself, by all means consult with your elder brother Jurobei--and come to a good understanding. I will leave you both for a while."

At a sign Gunbei's henchmen released Jurobei. "Persuade your sister to obey me and I will forgive you all and set you free. I must have Takao's affection. Think well, and give me an answer that will gladden me."

Then turning to Takao he continued:

"If you finally reject my proposals you shall both be cruelly put to death. Your two lives depend upon your will. I shall await your decision in the inner part of the house."

Here Gunbei retired. Blinded by his wild passion for the unfortunate girl he was unable to see the resolution expressed on both their faces. Both his mind and soul were clouded by the desire to possess at all costs the beautiful woman who defied him. Unaware of her high birth, the knowledge of which would have abashed him in his pursuit of her, he considered that she was the legitimate prey to his will.

Takao and Jurobei were left alone. They entered the room, crossing the veranda. Seating themselves, Jurobei made a profound obeisance at a respectful distance from Takao.

"Even though it is for the sake of the Kunitsugu sword, it is a sacrilege that the close relative of our noble Daimio should for one moment be called the sister of such a poor fellow as myself."

"It is not worth while to trouble your mind about these trifles while the finding of the sword is at stake. Think not of who is master or servant. We must find the sword this very night."

"Yes, yes," replied Jurobei, "I have the same purpose as yourself. Now is a good opportunity. Gunbei is madly in love with you. For a time pretend to listen to his wooing--whatever he may say do not let it anger you--then while he is off his guard draw out the sword he is wearing from its sheath: if the habaki (the ring which secures the guard to the blade) is of gold, ornamented with carven butterflies and flowers, and the markings on the edge of the blade is the midare-yake,^[8] be sure that it is the missing Kunitsugu sword. Then give me a sign. Till that moment I will be waiting in concealment close at hand."

"Yes, yes," answered Takao. "Although Gunbei's attentions are hateful to me, it is my duty, for the sake of the sword, to pretend to yield to him for a short time. In this way Sakurai will be saved. Let us agree upon a signal. I will go to the stream and, throwing some cherry flowers into it, I will repeat:

Hana wa sakura:
Hito wa bushi.

The cherry is first among flowers:
The warrior first among men."

They separated quietly. Takao sank upon the mats, musing sadly. The prospect that lay before her was utterly revolting to her mind. Meanwhile Gunbei, eager to know the result of the conference he had permitted between the two, quietly entered the room from behind.

Her attitude of dejection greatly enhanced her pale and aristocratic beauty, and Gunbei thought that she looked more ravishingly lovely than he had ever seen her before. The sight of her inflamed his longing to possess her as his own.

"What a woman!" he thought to himself. "She shall be mine!"

As he moved across the room, Takao, who was hitherto unaware of his presence, started to her feet.

"No, no," remonstrated Gunbei in seductive accents, "I cannot allow you to run away--do not deceive yourself for one moment. I have come for your answer, Takao. It is 'Yes,' is it not?"

He thought that as he found her alone and in this pensive frame of mind that Jurobei must have persuaded her to become his paramour. His pulses throbbed and the blood in his veins ran fire. In his overmastering passion he did not notice that his would-be victim shuddered as he took her hand and drew her close to him till she was reclining on his knees. Dreamily he whispered:

"Takao, you are as beautiful as an angel. Yield to my desire and I will make you my wife. Only listen to me, and all shall be as you wish both for yourself and your brother, Jurobei.--Come, come! Let us belong to each other!" and he endeavoured to draw her towards the inner room.

Takao, in the meantime, had rested her hand on the hilt of his sword and was about to draw it from its sheath.

"What are you doing, Takao! Why do you touch my sword?" asked Gunbei sharply, roused out of his reverie of love.

"Think of me no more! With this sword I will cut off my hair and become a nun. You may rest assured that never shall another man touch me all my life."

With these words she attempted to draw the sword from his girdle.

Gunbei, thwarted in his longing for the beautiful woman, now lost his temper. He pushed her roughly to one side:

"You scorn my love then? You are an obstinate creature! Instead of forgetting you I will torture Jurobei. You shall soon know what my hatred means." Clapping his hands, he called his confidential servant:

"Dotetsuke! Dotetsuke!"

When the man appeared his master wrathfully gave the imperious command:

"Tie up that woman to yonder cherry-tree."

Dotetsuke obediently dragged Takao into the garden and bound her with the rope that had a little time before made Jurobei a prisoner to the same tree.

Gunbei, who had watched the execution of his cruel order from the veranda, retired into the room to meditate sulkily on his ill-success. His heart was bitter within him with chagrin and baffled desire.

Suddenly, through a small side gate, there appeared a priest of sinister appearance who, approaching the balcony, saluted Gunbei.

"According to your wishes I have prayed seven days in succession for the Daimio of Tokushima to be seized with mortal illness. Where is my reward?"

"Do not speak so loudly!" reproved Gunbei. "You may be overheard! You shall be duly compensated for your services later. This is not the time. Return at once!"

"Yes, yes, I will obey you, but do not forget to let me have the money soon."

And Kazoin, the wicked priest, fingering his rosary and praying for evil, departed as stealthily as he had come.

Meanwhile the unhappy Takao was left alone. She struggled to free her hands from the cords that cut into her tender flesh, but in vain.

"What shall I do?" she sobbed. "Jurobei must be waiting for my answer. I must find some means of letting him know my condition. Is there no way by which I can get free? I am powerless to find the sword or to help Shusen."

She struggled desperately against the tree and in her anguish she murmured:

"Gunbei is surely a devil in human form. He has stolen the sword himself in order to incriminate others. Shusen will be lost and his house ruined unless we can recover it this very night."

In her violent efforts to wrench herself free the cherry-tree was shaken and several blossoms fell into the stream. The falling flowers brought hope and comfort to Takao's heart.

"The holy Buddha has come to our aid," she reflected. "Jurobei will surely see the flowers in the water, and think that it is the pre-arranged signal."

Meanwhile Jurobei, from his hiding-place, was watching the stream, waiting with impatience for the promised sign. Just as he was beginning to chafe at the unexpected delay he caught sight of a cluster of white blossoms floating down the current of the rivulet.

"Ah, then it was the Kunitsugu sword which Gunbei stole and wore on his person, never letting it out of his sight night or day."

[Illustration: Gunbei had watched the execution of his cruel order from the veranda.]

Creeping along within the shadow of the trees he stealthily made his way across the inner garden towards the room where he expected to find Takao.

But what was his surprise when he came upon her bound to the cherry-tree.

"Jurobei, at last you have come!" she gasped.

"Takao Sama, whatever has happened? Why are you treated like this?"

"It is because I could not endure Gunbei's hateful attentions," she answered, weeping. "Help me, I cannot move!"

Jurobei set to work to unfasten the ropes and in a few minutes Takao was released.

"Leave this matter to me!" advised Jurobei. "I will find some means of outwitting Gunbei yet."

And Jurobei, followed by Takao who was endeavouring to arrange her disordered robes, boldly strode into the room of his enemy.

The screens were pushed aside and Gunbei appeared. He glared fiercely at the intruding couple.

"How dare you release that woman without my permission?"

"It is my intention to counsel her to comply with your wishes," replied Jurobei, "therefore have I set her free--to give her to you as my sister."

"Ya, Jurobei, have your powers of persuasion induced your sister to consent to my proposals?" inquired Gunbei in mocking tones.

"Yes, I know not which I am, an elder brother or a go-between. If you have any other work for me, I am at your service."

"Ha, ha!" sneered Gunbei, "then as your sister agrees to please me we shall now be members of the same family. As a sign that we are closely related, take this by way of congratulation," and suddenly drawing his sword, he slashed at Jurobei.

Jurobei's keen eye forestalled the action, and, skilled fencer that he was, like lightning he seized a bucket close at hand and, holding it up, adroitly parried the rain of blows with this improvised shield.

"What does this mean?" he exclaimed. "This is too much attention even from a relative. It is troublesome. Surely so much ceremony between members of the same family is unnecessary. Please take it back."

Gunbei's answer was another wild attack on Jurobei, who nimbly avoided the thrusts.

While his whole attention was engrossed in trying to cut down Jurobei,

Takao stole behind him and snatched the long sword hanging at his side from its sheath.

"Here is the Kunitsugu sword," she joyfully exclaimed.

On hearing these words, Gunbei turned like a demon of fury upon her.

"If you have found it I will kill you both," shouted Gunbei.

But before he could execute his threat Jurobei seized him from behind.

Dotetsuke, a secret supporter of Shusen Sakurai, and who all this time has acted the part of a spy and pretended accomplice in Gunbei's vile schemes, now escorted his real master upon the scene.

Sakurai loftily addressed his unmasked foe.

"Your villainous plots are all laid bare, and it is impossible for you to escape justice. Confess all and pray for mercy."

Gunbei, choking with rage, flung off Jurobei and rushed upon his abhorred rival.

Sakurai skilfully parried the onslaught, seized Gunbei, and with a prodigious effort hurled him out into the garden.

"Dotetsuke!" called Sakurai, "come and help us!"

"Yes, yes!" answered the man, as he ran to Jurobei's assistance in holding the wretch down.

Gunbei started.

"What? Are you also on Shusen's side?" and he gnashed his teeth in impotent fury.

"You have won!" He turned to Shusen. "It is useless for me to attempt to conceal the truth. I stole the sword, thereby hoping to bring about your ruin. I can say no more. Take the sword and return to your house. Does not that suffice?"

"The sword is but a small part of the crimes you have committed. Listen, villain that you are! You have done a much greater wrong. Our Lord, the Daimio of Tokushima, has loaded you with favours, and you, like a dastardly traitor, have requited his kindness by conspiring to compass the death of your benefactor."

"Silence, Shusen! That is a lie. I have always hated you as my rival, but I have borne no spite towards our Lord. What proof could you

possibly have for such base allegations?" and Gunbei stared hard at his accuser.

Shusen smiled superciliously as he clapped his hands. In answer to the summons, Izæmon led in a prisoner, Kazoin, the wicked priest.

"Here are my witnesses of your schemes against the life of the Lord of Tokushima."

Gunbei realized his checkmate: there was nothing to be gained by lying further. He was a declared traitor. In desperation he attempted to rally his strength and attack Sakurai again, but he was promptly seized and again thrown down into the garden.

"You are a bad man, Gunbei. Our Lord shall judge you." Then turning to the men he gave the command:

"Bind him, hand and foot!"

When the mortified Gunbei lay helpless and cringing at his mercy, Shusen turned to his trusty vassal and addressed him, saying:

"Jurobei, I promote you in my service. You are a true and faithful knight. Let us rejoice, for we have triumphed and our enemy will receive his deserts--he is defeated!"

Takao here brought forward the sword and placed it slowly and ceremoniously before Jurobei who had staked his life, his house, his all, and lost his only child in the tragic search.

"It is found in time!" she said. "Look, the dawn breaks! It is the morning of the third of March!"

Receiving the weapon with a profound bow, Jurobei, on bended knees, raised it aloft in both hands and presented it to his feudal master, saying:

"To your keeping is at last restored the stolen treasure of our Daimio!" and thus ended the

Quest of the Lost Sword

Note.--Kunitsugu was the name of a famous swordsmith who lived at the end of the Kamakura Period, 1367.

[Footnote 1: A small knife which fits into the hilt of a sword.]

[Footnote 2: The Shrines of Kumano or The Three Holy Places date from the first century B.C., and are famous for their healing powers. The Nachi waterfall is the third of these ancient shrines, and is No. 1 of the thirty-three places sacred to Kwannon, the Goddess of Mercy.]

[Footnote 3: Lit. Flower-Capital = Kyoto.]

[Footnote 4: In old Japan the sentence of imprisonment, execution, and even crucifixion fell on the wife as well as all the children, even to the youngest babe of the criminal.]

[Footnote 5: _Koban_ = the name of an ancient pure gold coin elliptical in shape, worth about one _Yen_, but the purchasing value perhaps a hundred times what it is in the present day.]

[Footnote 6: _Ryo = Yen_, about two shillings, but in those times equal to perhaps a hundred times its present value.]

[Footnote 7: March by the old calendar fell a month later than the present way of reckoning.]

[Footnote 8: Swords of different smiths were distinguished by the marks on their blades, formed by the different methods of welding. The _midare-yake_ is an undulating line like the waves of the sea.]